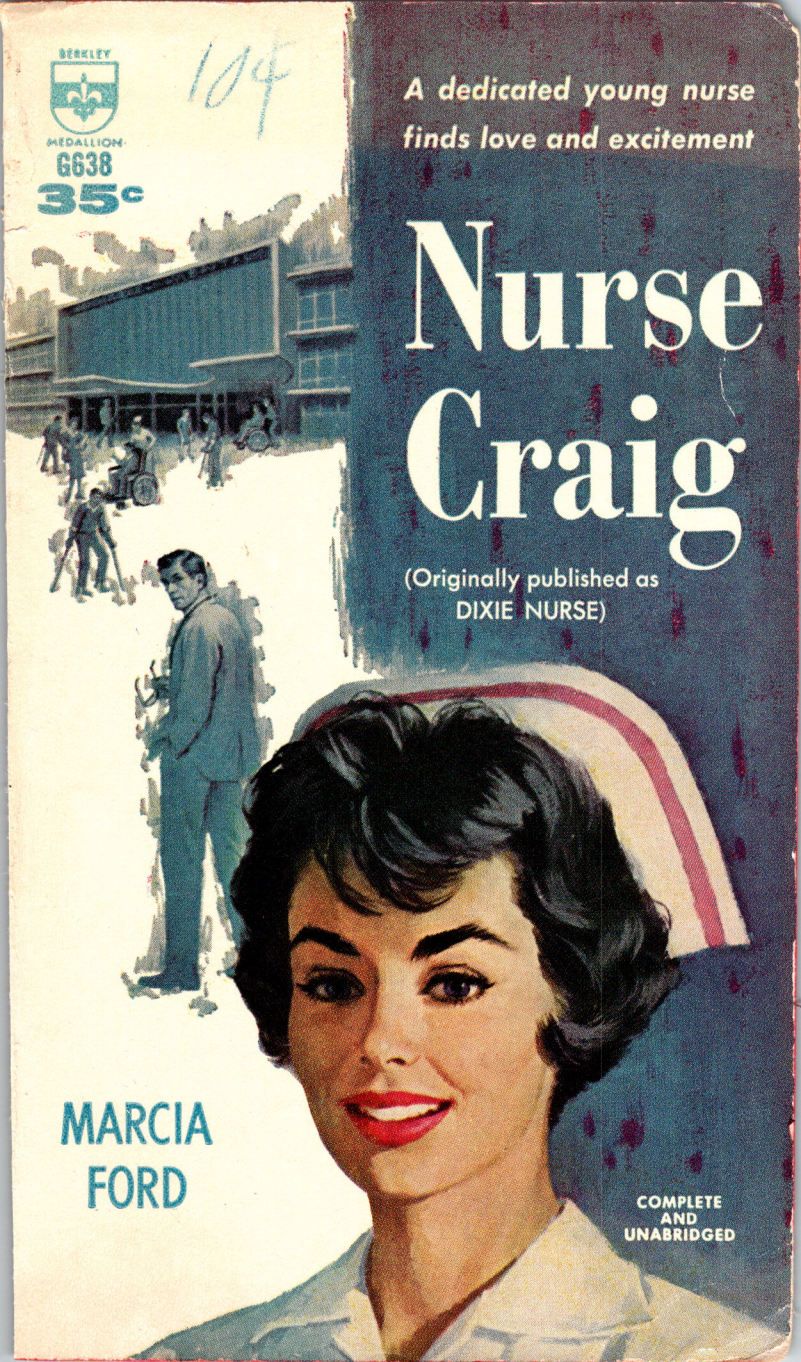
BERKLEY
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A dedicated young nurse finds love and excitement
Nurse Craig
(Originally published as DIXIE NURSE)
MARCIA FORD
COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

A Nurse's World

NANCY CRAIG had set her heart on working with children in the Pediatric Ward at Downer hospital where she could also be near

TERRY FENTON, the young doctor whom Nancy had met while she was in training and who was now in charge of the Pediatric Ward.

MISS PHILLIPS, the head nurse at Downer, disliked her, perhaps because Nancy was young, pretty, and very enthusiastic about nursing and serving humanity, or perhaps she resented and was jealous of Nancy.

DR. BARROW, the handsome staff physician, had an obvious interest in Nancy and it was rumored that Miss Phillips had a more than professional regard for him.

This is the exciting and heart-warming story of a dedicated young nurse and the problems that confront her, both in her career and private life.

NURSE CRAIG

(Originally published as
DIXIE NURSE)

Marcia Ford

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To Robert Stanley Radford, Jr.

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CHAPTER ONE

Nancy Craig followed Dr. Barrow out of the hospital room. He looked worried. Their very sick patient had not been responding to treatment as they had hoped. Mrs. Carter Fulton's case had been a difficult one, trying Nancy's professional patience to the limit, although she knew one must always expect considerable irritability from gastric-ulcer patients.

She had thought many times of the pediatric ward where she longed to be, but a general staff job was the best she could do until there was an opening in pediatrics.

Dr. Barrow paused in the hall to say, "I'm going to change her medicine."

Nancy followed him to the chart room, and watched as he sat down at the desk to write out his orders. She was shocked to see that his hand was not quite steady as he wrote. In the darkened sickroom she had not noticed the slight flush on his cheeks, and the puffiness around his eyes.

Dr. Barrow had been one of Nancy's favorite physicians since her student days. It was through him she had made her decision to go into nursing instead of kindergarten work. His level-headed counsel had boosted her over many difficult hurdles while she was in nurse's school, and since.

Now Nancy had a sinking feeling as she watched the unsteady hand writing out her orders. It had been six months since his wife's death. Surely by this time he should have regained some of his equilibrium. An unsteady hand might prove tragic to one who operated as often as he did.

He stood up and handed her the sheet of paper. "We'll see how she reacts to this," he said.

Nancy evidently could not hide the look of anxiety in her eyes, for he added quickly, "Don't worry about her too much, my dear. Ulcer patients are always a bit difficult."

She couldn't tell him that her anxiety was for him. To cover her confusion, she said, "You can expect children to cry over their pains, but when it's a fifty-year-old woman, you have to bite your tongue to keep from saying things."

He patted her arm affectionately. "Have patience, Nan. I hope it won't be too long before we have an opening in pediatrics."

"That's my one goal in life," she said, smiling up at him.

As Dr. Barrow started out, pretty Carol Harper breezed in. Carol was a light blonde with a wide mouth and a ready smile—and a tongue that was a bit too prone to gossip.

"Hi-ya, Doc! I see you made it!" she exclaimed, in her hail-fellow-well-met manner.

By that time the doctor was in the hall. If he made any reply, Nancy didn't hear it; she was already giving her attention to the medicines she had to select for her various patients.

"Bless his old heart," Carol said warmly. "I thought last night it would be at least twenty-four hours before he would be steady on his feet."

Although Nancy and Carol lived in the same apartment, they rarely saw each other in the morning. Carol was a nighthawk, accepting any and every invitation that came along, and as a consequence she frequently overslept in the morning, had to omit her breakfast, and arrived at the hospital like a whirlwind.

Nancy was shocked at what she had just said about Dr. Barrow. "What do you mean?" she asked, her glance sweeping to Martha Williams, who was cleaning the tables and sink.

"He got pretty tight at the Country Club last night."

"Why, Carol!"

"I'd be the last to blame him. A man's got to do something to drown his misery—with his beautiful wife gone, and his only son in Korea—but if it keeps up, it's the end of his career."

Nancy stood by the medicine cabinet listening in stunned amazement as Carol told of the dinner and dance at the club, a doctors' affair, when Dr. Barrow had really let down the bars. Remembering his puffy eyes, and the shaky hand, she had to admit that what she had heard was probably true, although Carol had a reputation for coloring her stories.

She glanced once or twice at Martha, but Martha seemed drowned in her own misery. She was making such a clatter that Nancy decided she could not have heard too much. Poor Martha had more than her share of troubles, too. Her husband had died recently, leaving her with three small children. Then last week Tommy, the oldest, had been brought into the hospital with polio.

Slowly Nancy picked up her tray and went back to her patients. When she had given Mrs. Fulton her medicine, she proceeded to put the room in order. As usual, her patient complained fretfully as she made the bed. Nancy usually had infinite patience with such irritability, but today Mrs. Fulton had tried her almost beyond endurance. If she could only be doing something right now for Martha's little boy in pediatrics, she thought with longing.

She had seen Martha's children for the first time at Christmas. She had taken charge of a fund raised by the nurses to buy Christmas gifts for the Williams' children, and she would never forget how proud Tommy had been of his skates. Now it seemed he might never wear them again.

When she went out to put fresh water in two vases of cut flowers, she met Martha in the hall.

"Now, Miss Nan," protested Martha, "I'll do that when I can get to it."

"Oh, I don't mind. I haven't anything else to do right this minute."

She knew Martha had to be up at dawn to get breakfast, clean house, and take her two younger children to the nursery before she came to the hospital. She was glad to save the woman as many steps as possible. She was tucking some pink roses into fresh water, humming happily as she did so, when she heard Terry Fenton's voice in the hall. She hadn't seen Terry since she had been taken on at the hospital, nor since he had been appointed resident physician in the pediatric ward.

She and Terry had had some wonderful times together when she was here at Downer for her nurse's training and he was an intern. They had rarely had money for a show or dinner, but they had had some memorable times together just the same. Their favorite recreation had been long walks along the river. Sometimes they would Dutch it in some wayside Bar-B-Que. Over sandwiches and Cokes they tried to plumb the depths of medical science and explore the universe. There was something very stimulating about Terry's analytical mind and his straight thinking. Both of them had the same goal in mind—the straightening of children's twisted and malformed bodies. Terry was going to specialize in pediatrics and Nan wanted to nurse in that department.

Now Terry was attaining his goal. He had already had a year's internship at Downer, and another year in the Middlewest in one of the finest pediatric hospitals in the country.

When he proudly told her about the appointment, he had said, "It's another step on the way I want to go. But it will still be years before I can pay back what I borrowed for my education. I can't even look at a girl, or think of having a home of my own till I'm free of debt."

"No girl would be worth having if she wasn't willing to take you as you are!" Nancy had replied almost tartly.

"When I marry, I'm going to be able to take care of my wife, without her feeling she has to work."

"Oh, be your age, Terry! Suppose the girl doesn't want to give up her career any more than you do? All women want to work and be independent these days."

She resented what he had said. Was he trying to tell her subtly, or not so subtly, that she might as well become interested in someone else if she wanted to get married any time soon? He had always managed to keep their friendship on a casual basis. After he went away, he wrote her only once, and at Christmastime there was the usual card she got from other friends.

In spite of her determination not to let herself think too often of Terry, she found her pulse speeding up perceptibly when she heard his deep voice in the hall. She didn't take time to trim the gladioli, but picked up the vase of roses. As she stepped through the door, Terry wasn't six feet away, and coming in her direction.

"Nan!" he cried. "I didn't know you were on duty here!"

"I've been here only a week. I thought I'd stand a better chance of getting on pediatrics by being on the spot—now that you're in charge."

"I'll give you the first opening," he promised. "You know I've been thinking of you."

"Dr. Barrow thinks, too, I'll get it."

"Oh, he does!" Terry's tone had chilled several degrees.

Why had she said that, she wondered? Terry had never liked Dr. Barrow. She remembered that he used to tease her about letting Lord Byron play fairy godfather to her.

Just at that moment she heard the distressing sounds of someone being nauseated, and almost at

the same time Martha rushed from Mrs. Fulton's room.

"Miss Nan, you'd better come," she cried in distress.

Nancy forgot Terry and everything else in her concern over her patient as she rushed into the room.

She had just stretched her patient back on the pillow and was mopping her face with a cold cloth when Miss Phillips, the head nurse, came in.

Nancy turned to her and said in a low tone, "The medicine evidently didn't agree with her. It's only been about ten minutes since I gave it to her."

Miss Phillips' small mouth tightened. She had never liked Nancy. She had been very exacting of the young nurse in her student days. Carol, who knew everything about the hospital personnel, had once remarked glibly, when Nancy was in tears over some hardship Miss Phillips had imposed, "She doesn't like you, Nan. Dr. Barrow is too fond of you."

"Why should that bother her? He doesn't have to hate me because Phillips does!"

"Jealousy. They say she was wild about him years ago. She turned into a crab apple for life when he married."

Miss Phillips looked like the crab apple Carol had called her as she snatched the curved basin from Nancy. "I'll see what's wrong," she snapped.

Mrs. Fulton's husband was on the hospital board, and Miss Phillips was not jeopardizing her job by having any complaints about the service from his wife.

Martha hung around after the head nurse went out, looking terribly concerned. Nancy stood by the bed putting cold cloths on her patient's head.

"Can I do something?" Martha asked anxiously.

"I didn't change the water in that other vase of flowers. If you like, you can pull off the dead blossoms and bring the fresh ones back," Nancy suggested.

She was getting out a clean bedjacket when

Martha came back with the flowers. "Reckon what made her so sick all of a sudden?" Martha whispered. "She ain't been so nauseated since the first day she came."

"The doctor changed her medicine this morning. I guess it didn't agree with her," Nan whispered.

This seemed to quiet the woman's uneasiness. Martha took life too seriously anyway, Nan thought. At thirty she seemed twice her age. She had often wondered how Martha would look with a bit of rouge on her sallow cheeks, and a little lipstick to soften the severe lines of her mouth. With a new wave in her mouse-colored hair, and a well-fitting dress, she wouldn't be bad looking at all.

When Martha had gone about her other duties, and Mrs. Fulton was dozing off again, Nan sat down beside the bed and leafed through a magazine, her thoughts slipping back to Terry. She wondered when she would see him again, for the hospital was enormous and the pediatric ward was at the extreme opposite end of the building.

Nancy went the rounds of her other patients, but found Mrs. Fulton still sleeping when she returned to her room near noon. She was about to go out again to get her trays when Miss Phillips stalked into the room. There seemed actually to be an electric aura around her, so charged was she with the venom inside.

"Miss Craig, I'll see you outside," she snapped.

Stunned by her manner, Nancy followed her out. Suddenly she began to have a premonition. Miss Phillips stood in the hall like an inquisitor, her hand on the doorknob. When Nancy stepped into the hall, she closed the door.

"Miss Craig, you can pack your things and leave," snapped the head nurse. "We don't keep nurses in this hospital who give patients the wrong medicine."

"Why, Miss Phillips, that's impossible!" exclaimed Nancy, as prickly as if an electric charge had gone through her.

"I've just had the contents of the pan analyzed. No wonder the poor woman was nauseated—the dose you gave her, in her condition."

Nancy started to explain that Dr. Barrow had just changed the medicine that morning, but she caught herself in time. She recalled his obvious hang-over. It seemed evident that he had made a mistake that might ruin his reputation as a physician if it became known. She couldn't let down someone who had been such a loyal friend to her for four years.

"I saw you in there gossiping with Carol Harper, when you should have had your mind on your duties. I won't put up with nurses like that on my ward."

Nancy felt her throat clutch with the grip of forceps. She couldn't say one word in her own defense. She saw the world she had built for herself in the last few years tottering in ruin. The news of her dismissal would spread like wildfire. No doctor would call her after this, even for private nursing. She knew she hadn't made a mistake—yet there was a faint shadow of doubt. As long as it was there, could she ever trust herself to look after the welfare of a patient? In a daze, she turned from Miss Phillips and almost ran down the hall to take off her uniform.

CHAPTER TWO

Letting herself into the apartment she shared with Carol Harper and Sue Miller, Nancy stood in the middle of the living room in a daze. Nothing seemed real. Surely things like this couldn't happen to a nurse who was as conscientious and careful as she always tried to be. Perhaps she would wake up in a few minutes to find it all only a nightmare.

With her professional instinct for order, she began to straighten the magazines and newspapers left

lying around last night. She picked up some fallen camellia petals and added them to an ash tray before she emptied it. The camellias had been an offering from one of Carol's admirers. Carol hadn't been too much impressed by these frequent gifts from Tony Sargent. She knew how to enjoy all her boy friends without taking any of them too seriously.

"One marriage and divorce is enough to last a long time," she had told Nancy and Sue.

If it wasn't for Carol's wagging tongue, maybe this wouldn't have happened, Nancy thought bitterly.

Then she jerked herself up. Why blame Carol? Why blame anyone but herself? But she hadn't made a mistake in getting out the medicine. She was positive of that. Then what *had* happened, if it hadn't been Dr. Barrow's fault?

She emptied the ash tray in the garbage pail and stood at the sink washing out the tray. Was she a fool to sacrifice her career because a doctor had a hang-over and couldn't think straight? But could she ever respect herself again if she went to Miss Phillips and tried to put the blame on Dr. Barrow? No, she couldn't do it, she simply couldn't, after all he had done for her.

She went back to the living room and threw herself on the couch, still too numb to think out what she should do next. She recalled the first time she had seen Dr. Barrow. It was the day she had saved the life of the Langley child out at Anderson's Lake. She had been only nineteen then, and just out of Junior College.

All her life she had been doing things for the sick or wounded; cats with battle scars were salved and bandaged. Once back home in the country it had been a crow with a broken wing that she nursed for weeks. Cows, dogs, chickens, she doctored them all.

As soon as she was old enough she began taking Red Cross first-aid courses. She had long ago passed the life-saving test, for she adored swimming. The summer after she finished at Summerton Junior

College, she had visited friends in the city, and had often gone out to Anderson's Lake. In the back of her mind had been the thought that she must get in all the good times possible before taking up the serious business of what she must do with her life.

That sultry afternoon she had just made a high dive and shot to the top when the alarm went out that little Nell Langley was missing.

"She was there a minute ago," Jack Langley called to his terrified mother on shore. "When I looked back, she was gone."

With three sweeping strokes Nancy was at the boy's side. "Where did you see her last?" she demanded.

"Right there, hanging on that little float."

Nancy went under in the direction he indicated. Almost at once she saw the child, lying on the sandy bottom directly under the float. Expertly she grasped the small bathing suit and shot to the surface. Others were already coming to the rescue by the time she reached the top, and they helped her get the limp child to the sloping beach.

Nancy stretched her out, and began to apply artificial respiration. "Keep the people back," she directed an alert young boy who had helped bring the child in.

A moment later, between her rhythmic pressure and release, she said, "Has anybody phoned a doctor?"

"Dr. Barrow is a little way up the lake, fishing," the boy said. "Somebody's already gone in an outboard motorboat for him."

Nancy could hear the put-put of the motor going up the lake. She kept up the rhythmic pressure and release, as she had been taught to do in her life-saving classes. So far there had been no response. How long had the child been under water? The frantic mother was standing by, sobbing hysterically.

"Take—her—away," Nancy panted to the rhythm of her pressure.

The distraught mother would not go. But Nancy forgot her the next moment as the child began to respond. A few minutes later Nell Langley opened her eyes. Nancy turned sharply to the child's mother and whispered, "Control yourself—you'll frighten her."

Someone brought a blanket. Nancy was wrapping her in it when Dr. Barrow stepped ashore from the boat. He wore soiled slacks and an old straw hat, but even in this garb Nancy realized what a handsome man he was.

"I see you've already taken care of the case nicely," said the doctor, smiling down at Nan and the child.

While he put his fingers on the child's pulse, Mrs. Langley gushed, "She saved Nell's life. She dived for her and brought her back to life."

Someone must have phoned for an ambulance as soon as the child disappeared, for now they heard the sound of its siren.

"But we don't need it now!" exclaimed Mrs. Langley. "She's all right."

"I think you'd better take her to the hospital for a check-over—to be sure she gets over the shock. I'll come on down as soon as I get on my clothes," said the doctor.

Mrs. Langley turned to Nancy imploringly. "Won't you come with me in the ambulance—in case anything happens on the way?"

"Of course. I'll be glad to," agreed Nancy. "But I'll have to get my clothes."

Sue Miller, who had driven out to the lake with Nancy, said, "I'll get your things from the locker, Nan, and pick you up at the hospital."

On the way down in the ambulance Nancy pulled on her linen dress over her bathing suit and slipped her bare feet into her sandals, while she loosed her golden-brown hair from her cap.

Before they reached the hospital, the child came

out of her dazed condition and asked, "Where we goin'?"

When that question was answered, she wanted to know why. Nancy and Mrs. Langley had a hard time keeping her quiet until she could be checked.

A half hour later, after Dr. Barrow had examined the child in the emergency room, he told the mother she could take her home safely.

At the door he reached over and patted Nancy's arm as he said to Mrs. Langley, "It looks as if you owe your child's life to this young lady."

"Don't I know it! She was wonderful—knew just exactly what to do. She didn't lose her head the way I did."

"That's the kind of person we need in the nursing profession. Ever consider being a nurse, young lady?"

"How did you guess?" Nancy replied eagerly. How excited she was over having this handsome doctor take such an interest in her! "I've been trying to make up my mind all summer whether to be a nurse or a kindergarten teacher."

"I'd say you're a born nurse," Dr. Barrow told her. "And they're hard to find. In fact, we never have enough nurses."

"Don't they train nurses here at Downer Hospital?" she asked.

"Right here, and the fall term begins soon."

"Do you think I could get in?"

"I'll introduce you to the right people," he told her, his warm brown eyes crinkling at the corners. "I'll see that you get in, but you'd better enroll right away."

"Tomorrow?"

"Ten in the morning will be fine. I'll see you here in my office."

So with this encouragement, Nancy began nurse's training that September. Dr. Barrow had been wonderful to her, giving her bits of advice that were extremely valuable, joking with her about her progress when she met him in the corridors or paused at his

open office door to speak to him. It gave her a feeling of confidence and assurance to have this experienced older man sponsor her so wholeheartedly.

It was in her last year of training that she began to have trouble with Miss Phillips, superintendent of the woman's ward. Miss Phillips seemed to go out of her way to pick flaws in Nancy's work. Often she accused Nancy of doing things of which she was entirely innocent.

One morning when she passed Nancy and Dr. Barrow in the hall, exchanging a few words, she glared at Nancy and looked as if she would like to say something to her. A few minutes later, as Nancy was coming out of a patient's room with an armload of soiled linens, Miss Phillips waylaid her.

"You could have had that done sooner if you hadn't stopped so long to fawn over Dr. Barrow," she said.

"Why—why I merely stopped to ask him about a friend, a girl who fractured her leg."

"I don't care what your alibi is. I don't approve of gossiping in the halls. It annoys the patients."

It was something like that every few days, until Nancy felt heckled almost to the point of tears. In fact, she did dissolve into tears one day after an especially unpleasant set-to with Miss Phillips, only to be discovered by Dr. Barrow mopping her eyes by a hall window.

"Wait a minute now," said the doctor, in a comforting tone. "What's become of my bright sunshine girl?"

When Nancy broke down completely, he caught her arm, walked her off to the office, and closed the door behind them.

"Now out with it, young lady. What's upset you so?"

Nancy hated to be a tattler, but she had been tried beyond endurance that day. "It's Miss Phillips," she said between sobs. "I can't do anything to please her, no matter how hard I try. She even accuses me of doing things I haven't done. If she can

possibly find any flaw in my work, she does. There can be ninety-nine things right and one thing wrong, and that one is the first thing she's aware of."

"She *is* a little sour," Dr. Barrow admitted, "but she's an excellent nurse, and just the sort of disciplinarian most student nurses need."

"Well, I think she's a little too strict. Why, she even bawled me out the other day for stopping to ask you about Janie Walter's fracture."

The expression in Dr. Barrow's fine eyes changed to one of sudden illumination.

"Try to be patient with her, Nan. She had a disappointment in love years ago. It's made her bitter."

"I can't imagine any man ever loving *her!*"

"That was just the trouble. She loved without being loved. But she's an excellent nurse, and thoroughly reliable."

"But I'm afraid her criticism of my work may keep me from getting my diploma."

"Oh, she couldn't do that. Too many of the doctors and other nurses know what excellent work you do. In fact, I've begun to think of you as the brightest star at Downer. The nursing profession could use many more like you."

"Oh, Dr. Barrow!" exclaimed Nancy, a smile banishing her tears.

"You could make a dying man get well with that smile, Nan."

It was little incidents like this that had made Dr. Barrow dear to her.

Another time when the subject of Miss Phillips' acidity came up, Dr. Barrow advised Nancy, "Don't wait too long to get married, Nan. A woman gets too critical and choosy, when she does."

Nancy smiled a bit ruefully. "Most of the boys I meet are so up to their necks in debt for their education that marriage for them is far in the future."

"A little poverty and struggle never hurt any couple," he said wisely. "It was two years after I married before I paid my way out of debt, but they

were two of the most wonderful years of our lives. The struggle welds a couple more closely together."

"But some men don't want their wives to work."

She was thinking of Terry Fenton, whom she had met in his senior year when he was working in the clinic. He had taken out a child's tonsils, and Nancy had helped with the operation.

Terry had had the gangling, rawbony frame of a young boy, though he was twenty-four at the time. There was something a little tense about his face from his eagerness to make a success of his work. But his fine gray eyes fairly glowed when he smiled.

When he complimented Nancy on her excellent help, she said, "I adore children, and they seem to know it. I'd like to specialize in pediatric nursing."

"I want to be a pediatrician," he confided, "if I can afford the extra training." He glanced at his watch. "Would you have time for a cup of coffee and a sandwich down at the Snack Bar?" he asked. "It's time for lunch, anyway."

"I'm ravenous," she admitted.

On the stools over the counter they found other mutual interests than children. He liked swimming and long walks. And in the course of his walks he had become quite a nature lover.

"It's a good thing I like to walk," he said, with a laugh. "My old flivver can't be counted on for more than my trips to the slums to deliver babies."

Many of his remarks were based on his pinched financial condition. He was already trying to pay back money he had borrowed from his meager salary at the hospital. She let him pay for that first lunch, but never after that. It made their friendship delightfully free and uninhibited. As often as not she would suggest a walk, a swim, or lunch together on a Dutch-treat basis. Otherwise, they would have missed a companionship that had come to mean a great deal to each of them.

The year she was a senior he received his M.D. degree and became an intern at Downer. That would

have been a perfect year for Nancy but for Miss Phillips' heckling.

The night she donned her nurse's uniform and became a graduate nurse Terry took her out to celebrate.

"Doll up," he said. "We're going to do it right tonight."

"But, Terry, can you afford it?"

"Don't nag, woman! A man's got to cut loose sometime—"

She took off her immaculate uniform and put on her one and only formal, a pale blue chiffon. She made a corsage of two of the pink roses Terry had sent her. She thought the roses had been extravagant enough without his throwing the little supper party for her in the Bamboo Room at the Bon Air. He had also invited Sue and a classmate of his, Alan Carver. But two more were enough to make the party a bit festive. Nancy's graduation and Terry's recent appointment to the pediatric hospital in St. Louis had put them all in a gay mood.

Dr. Carver took them in his new convertible. He had been out of school two years and already had a fine private practice. When they were settled in the car, Terry turned to Nancy. "I sold the old jalopy today," he said.

"But, Terry, how can you live without her?"

"I can do very well without a car on my new job. I still can hardly believe my luck—a whole year as an intern in a pediatric hospital."

"I'm really glad—but how awful, too!" exclaimed Nancy.

A whoop of laughter came from the front seat.

"Can you figure out what she *does* mean?" asked young Dr. Carver.

"I mean I'll miss him like everything!"

"Well, it has to be, old dear. You'll be occupied with general nursing after tonight, anyway."

"That's the trouble with graduation," she complained. "Too many changes."

"At least now you won't have to see Crab-apple Phillips every day," Sue said with a laugh.

Sue, only a year out of nursing school, already had made a name for herself in private practice. Now that Nancy would no longer be living in the nurses' quarters at Downer, the two girls were going to get an apartment together. Sue was the sort of girl anyone could get along with. She never interfered or pried, but was always a willing listener when troubles piled up to the point where they must be unburdened.

A week after the supper party, a new phase of life began for Nancy. Terry left town and Nancy was called on her first private case.

CHAPTER THREE

Nancy and Sue found a convenient apartment with a private entrance. It was the first home Nancy had had since she left her family at Glendale to enter Junior College. She took a week-end trip home to bring back curtains, draperies, vases, and a few bits of furniture to make the place cozy. A month later Carol Harper joined them, sharing Sue's room, and they were able to cut expenses, for the young nurses soon found that their incomes from private nursing were not as dependable as institution jobs.

Nancy waited in vain for an opening in the pediatric ward at Downer. A year after graduation, however, she was offered a staff job in the woman's ward. Even though this would bring her in contact with Miss Phillips again, she decided to accept it for the steady income, and the better prospect of getting pediatric nursing when there was an opening. But now, with this incredible and unexpected turn of

events, she feared she was further from her goal than ever.

Her mind went round and round in circles, always coming back to the unexpected events of the morning. From sheer futility of thinking she broke down finally and wept, then tried to force herself not to think of it till she fell into a troubled sleep. She didn't rouse till Carol came off duty about three-thirty.

She stirred groggily, thinking it was night and that Carol was just coming in from a date when she heard the click of her key in the door, and her heel-tapping step as she crossed the living room. But as she opened her eyes, memory of the awful truth flooded over her.

There was deep concern in Carol's usually smiling face. "What happened?" she asked. "There were all sorts of rumors."

Nancy sat up slowly, misery in her face and the very posture of her body. She had been so sunk in despair she had not even thought out what explanation she would give her two friends.

"I got shipped—that's all," she replied almost peevishly.

"What for?" Carol came back. "Even Phillips wouldn't dare throw you out just because she's jealous of you."

"Mrs. Fulton got terribly nauseated, and Phillips accused me of giving her the wrong medicine."

"How ridiculous! You expect an ulcer patient to be nauseated sometimes."

"I shouldn't ever have taken a staff job where I'd be closely associated with her," Nancy moaned. "But I thought it would give me a better chance to get on pediatrics when there's an opening."

"But gosh, Nan, I can't imagine your giving anybody the wrong medicine—anybody as careful as you."

If she asserted that she hadn't given the wrong

medicine, Carol would grow more inquisitive, and that might implicate Dr. Barrow.

"Oh, please let's not talk about it," she said wearily. "What's the use? It's over and done with—and I'm washed up a year after graduation!"

"Washed up, my eye! Just because Phillips is green-eyed with jealousy. You're silly to think your work has ended just because of one setback."

"You keep mentioning jealousy as her reason for hating me. What makes you think so?"

"Mrs. Pearson, who took nurse's training with Phillips years ago, told me for a fact today that it was Dr. Barrow Phillips was daffy about."

"Then it must be true."

"In fact, she was so madly in love with him that she tried to bump herself off when he got married."

"I wonder if she hates everybody in the world that Dr. Barrow likes."

"No telling. But I've thought for a long time that that was the reason Phillips had it in for you."

"Poor thing—why, that's really pitiful," said Nan, the expression on her face softening. "If she only had sense enough to realize it, Dr. Barrow has always treated me as if I were his daughter. He must be at least twenty years older than I am."

Carol's blue eyes twinkled. "Plenty of men marry women with that much difference in their ages. If he showed half as much interest in me as he does in you, I'd surely go after him."

"Carol, it never crossed my mind to think of Dr. Barrow in that way—"

"You know the old saw—better an old man's darling than a young man's slave. I tried love and poverty once. It didn't work. The struggle put too great a strain on love. I'd like a chance at money and ease next time. For that, I could put up with an old man, especially one as attractive as Dr. Barrow."

"Carol! The very idea! Why, when he's sixty you'd be under forty, full of the zest for life, while he'll want to stick at home and toast his toes."

"Not Doc. He's too good a sport. I'd take a chance on him," Carol called back from the bedroom where she had gone to take off her uniform.

Nancy sat staring at the coffee table in front of her. What Carol had said gave her a new insight into the situation. If she had realized this all along, she might have evaded situations that had stirred up Phillips' jealousy. She made up her mind that she would never place herself where she would be in close association with the head nurse.

When Carol came back into the living room, pulling her dress over her head, she said, "But don't worry, Nan; I'm not planning to go after him."

"I'd as soon think of falling in love with my own uncle as with Doc. Your imagination can certainly run away with you at times, Carol."

Suddenly Nan wanted to get away from Carol and her probing. What would she think if she knew Nan was taking the rap to protect Dr. Barrow? Could she be in love with the man without realizing it? Instantly she dismissed the idea as absurd. Her feelings toward Terry and Dr. Barrow were entirely different.

Carol had just zipped up her dress when they heard the doorbell ring sharply. "Who in the heck is that, this hour of the afternoon?" she asked, crossing the room with her long, free-limbed stride. When she swung the door inward there was a delivery boy with a long green florist's box.

"Thanks," Carol said as heartily as if the boy himself had been making the gift. As she closed the door, she added, "For you, Nan."

Surprised, Nan let Carol put the box on her lap. "Who in the world?" she murmured.

She slipped the cord off the box and lifted the lid to reveal a dozen talisman roses. Instantly she knew who had sent them. Once in a sickroom when she was admiring some talisman roses, Dr. Barrow had overheard her say they were her favorites. Twice before this he had sent her roses; once when she had the flu, and then on the night of her graduation.

"Somebody likes you an awful lot—that's certain," said Carol significantly. She bent closer to read the card Nan had taken out. "Dr. Barrow . . . What did I tell you?"

Had he sent these to salve a guilty conscience? Nancy wondered, and then hated herself for the thought. Then she saw there was something written on the back of the card. In the hand she knew so well, she read, "To let you know I believe in you fully, and trust you completely."

The sympathetic words brought tears brimming into Nancy's eyes. Wordlessly she handed the card to her friend.

"Didn't I tell you he was a great guy!" exclaimed Carol, her own eyes glowing with sympathy.

Nancy felt disloyal thinking it, but suspicions bobbed up again. Had Dr. Barrow sent the roses to ease his own guilty conscience?

She had had a momentary hope that Terry had sent the flowers to celebrate seeing her again after his long absence, though she had to admit that that would be an extravagant thing for a person in his financial position to do.

As she arranged the flowers, she thought of the old-fashioned rose garden behind her home at Glendale. Suddenly she had a great yearning to go home, where she was loved and understood and wanted. Some of Mom's cooking would be wonderful after hospital diet, and the light snacks at the apartment.

"I've about decided to go home," she told Carol, as she went back into the living room.

"Not walking out on us, are you?"

"Oh no, but a week or so at home may set me straight again. This thing really has bowled me over."

"When are you going? Can I help you pack?"

"As soon as I can get off. The Atlanta buses that pass through Glendale leave about every two hours. I'd like to get in before they're all in bed, so that somebody can drive down to meet me."

Nan went to her room to pack, thinking the sooner

she left the better. Sue would be coming in later, and would question her about the dismissal even more probingly than Carol had.

An hour later she called a taxi with barely enough time to catch the six-ten bus. In going through town, however, her taxi was held up by a long freight train, one of the frequent annoyances of Summerton. Citizens had sent letters in vain to the newspaper forums, and the city council, trying to be rid of this nuisance, and nervously Nan kept eyeing her watch. At nine minutes after six they were at last able to cross the tracks. They were a block away from the bus station when Nancy saw her bus pulling out.

"What rotten luck!" she said. "But go ahead," she directed the driver, when he slowed down and glanced back at her. "I'll catch the next one."

There was no point in going back to the apartment. She would check her bag and get something to eat at the bus station.

She had just bought her ticket and checked her bag when she felt a light touch on her arm. Turning, she was amazed to see Terry Fenton.

"Why, Terry—where're you going?"

"Nowhere." He took her arm and they wormed their way through the crowd. "Why are you running away?" he asked in an undertone.

"I'm not running away. I haven't been home in months—and I need a change."

"You're running away, just the same," he persisted.

"What makes you think that? Who have you been talking to?"

"Several people. I phoned the apartment. Carol said if I hurried I might see you."

So Carol had been talking, Nancy thought. To Terry, she said, "I missed my bus—held up by one of those long freight trains."

They were out at the end of the waiting platform by then, where there were few travelers between

buses. She was glad now that she had missed her bus. Otherwise, she wouldn't have seen Terry.

But Terry was like Carol, determined to have the truth. "What happened, Nancy? I went over to the ward to ask you for a date about the time I thought you were getting off, and was told you were no longer on that ward."

"That's right. I was fired," Nancy said shortly. Everyone seemed to want to rub it in.

"But why?" he persisted.

"Really, Terry, I'd rather not talk about it—" To say that Miss Phillips had always hated her would sound catty.

He led her out to the curb where his car was parked. Nancy saw at once that it was another second-hand car. Terry was still stretching his pennies.

"A nurse doesn't lose out except for incompetence and infringement of the rules. I'll never believe you were dismissed for either."

"Thanks, Terry. I guess Miss Phillips just didn't like my treatment of the patients."

He helped her into his car before he answered. "But *why* doesn't Miss Phillips like you? There's never been a nurse at the hospital more generally liked than you."

Nancy turned and gave him one of her most radiant smiles. "You're good for my deflated ego," she said softly. "But it's certain I've never been a favorite of Miss Phillips'."

"What's eating her?"

"Carol says she's jealous." No sooner were the words out than Nancy knew she had said the wrong thing. But in her eagerness to switch away from details that might involve Dr. Barrow, she had been imprudent.

"Jealous! What of—or who?" exclaimed Terry.

"Carol and I both heard that Miss Phillips was in love with Dr. Barrow before he married—even tried to kill herself when he passed her up. She can't

stand it that he's been nice to me—he's been a sort of godfather to me ever since I started training."

"Hump! I wonder . . . You forget he's a free man. People will regard your friendship a little differently, now he's a widower."

Nancy was flattered that Dr. Barrow's attentions had attracted Terry's notice, but she said scornfully, "Dr. Barrow must be forty-five, if he's a day."

"But he's still going strong. I hear he had to be taken home from the club the other night. I passed him in the corridor this morning and he didn't look fit to be on duty."

"He's had enough trouble lately to drive him to drink."

Terry turned sharply to face her. "I believe you're really in love with the man."

"Don't be absurd! I'd just as soon think of falling in love with my Uncle Ben. But Dr. Barrow *has* been wonderful to me and I won't see him belittled."

"Oh, well it's not worth quarreling over." Suddenly Terry seemed anxious to dismiss the unpleasant topic. "You'd better come on in the café for a bite before your bus leaves."

"I don't think I could swallow a mouthful," she said, but she let him help her out of the car anyway.

As she sat down in the café she realized that she hadn't eaten anything since breakfast. Her depression might be partly due to hunger, she thought, so she ordered a Spanish omelet, a salad, and coffee.

Terry duplicated her order, and soon their sharp words were forgotten as he began to tell her about his very interesting work at the hospital in Missouri.

This led to a discussion of his new work at Downer, and Nancy asked about Martha Williams' little boy, who was under his care.

"He may walk again if he can continue to get the right treatment, but we haven't space to keep those charity patients too long."

"If I had stayed on at Downer I meant to give Martha some instructions in massage and exercises

for him when he goes home. I had wonderful luck with a little boy about his age—the second patient I had after I graduated." She gave a detailed account of what she had done for the child.

"I'd like to have you on my ward. We could use someone with your experience—and interest. I have one nurse who speaks of children as brats. I could get along fine without her, but she has pull in the right places."

"Thanks, Terry, for the confidence—after what happened."

"I'll never for a moment believe it was your fault. There's more to it than you're telling."

"I don't want to talk about it, Terry," she said, glancing at her watch. "It's almost time for my bus." She placed her napkin on the table.

"How long will you be away?" he asked.

"I don't know. This gives me an excuse for a rest I've been needing. I'm not even sure I'll come back to Summerton. It might be better to get a fresh start somewhere else."

"Now that really would be running away," he said, challenge in his tone. "The only way to prove Phillips had no cause for what she did is to come back here and continue to show people what an excellent nurse you are."

"Probably no doctor will want me, after this. Miss Phillips won't give me a recommendation."

"You'll see," he retorted.

When he was about to leave her at the bus door, he said, "I'll be free Sunday. I may drive up to Glendale to see you, if you'll let me."

"Oh, Terry, I'd love to have you—you've never met my folks. I'll be looking for you," she said cordially.

CHAPTER FOUR

Glendale nestled in a little valley in the foothills of Georgia. Nancy's heart lifted as the bus left the flatlands and began to swoop down one hill and up the next like a huge roller coaster. Peach orchards were decked in a pink haze, while a pale-green veil covered many of the more ambitious trees, making a vivid contrast to the dark green of the pines. How she loved the foothills! At the peak of every hill there were breath-taking glimpses of blue ridges in the distance. It gave one a feeling of expansiveness and freedom.

And how good it was to be going home! For a time at least she could shed the exacting routine to which she had had to conform for so long. She thought a little uneasily of Terry coming up on Sunday, for their house was just a small-town place, a little shabby though cozy and homey. Their living room was truly a living room, where all the family gathered when off duty; Dad in house slippers after being on his feet in the hardware store all day, Ellen with her homework spread on the desk, sixteen-year-old Mike with his nose buried in a book, Ted generally sprawled on the floor, poring over the latest funny book, while her mother was generally occupied with a pile of mending.

Though Terry was strained financially now, it had not always been so in his family. The Fentons were one of Summerton's oldest and most aristocratic families. But in Terry's early teens both parents had died and the fine old home had been sold to clear up debts. There was not enough left to see the daughter and two sons through college. Terry had made his way through alone. His sister had married, and his

brother, Carl, was now doing his two years in the service.

She wondered what Terry really thought about her dismissal. Even though Miss Phillips was known to be a severe disciplinarian, her discharge must leave some shadow in his mind, especially since she had refused to give him details.

Sitting there alone on the bus, and feeling momentarily detached from her home and professional life, she began to wonder if she had made a mistake. She tried to think back over every detail of the morning's experience. She had had medicine for about eight patients on her tray. She had long since formed the habit of reading her directions carefully, and checking off the dosage against the little name card behind each one on the tray. Then she always went back over and checked again to make sure she had made no mistake. Fortunately, there had been no narcotics or very drastic medicine among the pills and liquids she had had to administer that morning!

As her thoughts went over and over her preparations in the chart room, she felt positive she had made no mistake. It couldn't have been anything but Dr. Barrow's foggy thinking that had caused the patient's illness. However, even if she knew that positively, it would have been useless to try to switch the blame to him. This would have riled Miss Phillips all the more.

She recalled once in her student days when Miss Phillips had threatened to have her dropped from the nursing school. She had prepared a special tray for a very ill patient, and was taking it down the hall, when two doctors, absorbed in conversation with each other, had barged into her, making her drop the tray. It *would* be her luck for Miss Phillips to be coming out of the chart room just in time to see the dishes and food crash to the floor.

"Such carelessness, Miss Craig!" the supervisor had exclaimed angrily. "If you can't take better care of

hospital property than that you ought to go into some other kind of work."

With the two doctors standing there, neither admitting it had been his fault, there was nothing Nan could do but accept the blame and take Miss Phillips' condemnation with the best grace possible. She couldn't believe she had made the second mistake, any more than she had made the first. Yet the faint shadow of a doubt that haunted her made her wonder if she could ever have confidence in herself on another case. Suppose the medicine had been something that had killed Mrs. Fulton, instead of merely making her nauseated?

Nancy couldn't pull herself out of her dark mood until she realized they were approaching Glendale. The long spring twilight lit the passing landscape in a warm glow. She tried to shake off her depression. Her family must never guess she had come home to bridge an awkward gap in her life. She had absolutely no plans for the future, nor any idea how long she would stay here.

From the telephone booth in the drugstore, which also served as a bus station, Nancy phoned home. She would have walked out to surprise them, but her suitcases were heavy and it was at least a mile away. The old Craig home had once been a sprawling farmhouse, but the farm acres had been sold off and cut into streets, so they no longer lived on a farm, but where town and country met.

There was a lilt in Mrs. Craig's voice when she recognized her daughter's voice. "Oh, darling, why didn't you let us know? I'd have had a real supper —as it is all we have left over is some hash and some fresh cookies."

"Oh, Mom, your hash tastes as good as the best T-bone steak in a restaurant. But I had supper before I left. Can somebody run down to meet me?"

"Of course. Mike will be right down. He'll have to come in the delivery truck. We let Ellen use the

car. A bunch of her classmates are having supper out at the lake. Their graduating parties have started already."

"Why, I don't mind the truck at all."

Five minutes later the Craig Hardware truck pulled up at the curb by the drugstore. Her father drove back and forth in it, so that his family could have the use of the car. Mike was out of the truck almost as soon as it stopped, darting across the sidewalk to take her bags.

"Hi-ya, Michael!" exclaimed Nancy heartily, not daring to kiss her gangling brother as she wanted to. "You surely must have stepped on it."

"Thirty-five miles an hour—no faster," Mike asserted, as he picked up her bags and went toward the car.

"Mother wrote me you'd gotten your driver's license."

"And haven't had a run-in with the cops yet," Mike said, a grin spreading over his freckled face. His eyes and hair were of one hue, a sort of reddish-brown.

"How's everybody? Pop feeling any better than when I was at home Christmas?"

"Can't say he is. I try to make him let me take over at the store on Saturdays, but he thinks the world can't tick without him to wind it up."

Mike passed some school friends and honked importantly. On a corner Nancy saw Nell Dawson, one of her childhood friends. Nell stood on her toes and waved excitedly. It was wonderful being home where you knew everyone.

As they drove into the double garage Nancy saw her mother, her father, and Ted coming down the nasturtium-bordered walk to greet her. Ted was the first to reach her, and Nancy caught him in a bear hug. Even though ten-year-old Ted seriously objected to kissing in public, he raised no objections in the back yard to the outburst of affection from the

sister who had lived away from home for so long. Then Nancy was caught between her parents, and they went happily toward the house together.

The boys went stomping up the stairs carrying her bags, and Nancy followed to the back bedroom which she had always shared with Ellen. Her mother followed. "It's a wreck," she said. "Ellen was in such a hurry to get off to the party."

"Looks good to me—it's home," said Nancy, with a sigh of satisfaction at being once more in the large, many-windowed room overlooking the garden.

As she took off her tiny hat, her mother said, "You really took us by surprise. After you got on the hospital staff we didn't look for you for a long time."

Mrs. Craig was studying her daughter's face a bit quizzically, and Nan turned hastily away to find a place for her hat on the closet shelf. Her mother was almost psychic about her children.

"I needed a rest," Nancy said evasively. "Since I graduated, I've only had those two days off at Christmas."

"I hope things are going better between you and Miss Phillips, now that you're a graduate nurse."

"Well, I'm sorry to report that Miss Phillips doesn't love me any better than she did before. But I came home to forget my work—" She stopped abruptly.

Mrs. Craig dismissed the subject instantly. "Let's go down," she said. "Your dad and the boys will want to visit with you, too. Wasn't it a lucky thing I made that batch of cookies this afternoon? They'll go fine with a pot of hot chocolate."

Nan thought, as she went down the steps behind her mother, that she ought to tell her what had happened. But that would call for explanations she didn't want to give. She was sure her mother suspected that something unusual had happened to bring her home unannounced.

She was shocked when she saw her father's tired face in the brightness of his reading lamp. He put

down his paper as she came in, and his eyes glowed with the pleasure of having her at home.

"Sit down and tell us everything, Nancy," he said. "Your letters are a bit sketchy."

"You know how it is, Dad—on duty eight hours, dates in the evening or a stay-at-home with two other nurses to get washing, mending, and ironing done."

"Sure—there've got to be dates, whether there're letters home or not," put in Mike, lowering his book to grin at Nan.

"Huh, Sis never was boy crazy like Ellen!" exclaimed Ted, sorting a pile of comic books on the floor. "That Ellen—all she thinks about is her dates, and gabbing over the phone to some girl about who she dated last, and who she hopes is gonna take her to some party or show."

"Just wait; your time is coming," said his mother, her eyes twinkling. "Look at Mike. Only last year he'd cross the street rather than speak to a girl. Now he's all aglow when one comes in sight."

"'Specially Patsy Reynolds!" put in Ted.

"Oh, why do people have to tell everything they know!" exclaimed Mike, and flounced out of the room.

But he came sneaking back a few minutes later when the fragrance of hot chocolate began to fill the house. After they had consumed the hot chocolate and cookies, Ted brought out a new game.

"Ellen don't ever stay home long enough to play it with us," he said scornfully. "But three can play it fine."

"Now, Ted, Nancy doesn't want to play games the very first night she's home. She wants to talk and rest," said Mrs. Craig.

"Oh, I'll just play one with them."

Nancy welcomed the game. Several times she had been in a tight spot to evade her parents' probing about why she had come home so unexpectedly. She knew she couldn't keep them in the dark much

longer, but she was too tired and confused tonight to know what to say or how to say it. After a good night's sleep, things might seem clearer and the future not so black.

CHAPTER FIVE

When Nancy opened her eyes the next morning, her sister's tumbled bed told her she had been there, but she had slept peacefully through her coming and going. The house was so still she surmised that her father and the boys had already left.

An east window was open, and warm spring sunshine lay in a bright bar on the broad, polished boards of the old floor. The two north windows overlooking the garden and chicken run were open, too. Nancy could hear a hen clucking as she hunted her nest. Everything here seemed relaxed and uncomplicated. How nice it would be to go on drifting like this until all her strain and unhappiness had vanished!

She saw that the sun was high and made herself get up. In the bottom drawer of her chest she found some old slacks, and in the closet a pair of barefoot sandals she had left at home. As she pushed the dresses aside to look for the sandals, she saw that Ellen had three new evening dresses. It gave her a moment of uneasiness. Ellen was a little selfish and demanding. Nancy wondered if the strain of trying to supply her with all her graduation needs was partly the cause of her father's worried expression.

It was nine-thirty when she went down to find her mother shelling green peas by the kitchen window.

"I didn't call you for breakfast," Mrs. Craig said. "I thought you needed the rest. Your eggs are in

the little pot ready to be boiled. I just brought in a dozen fresh ones. The hens are doing real well now."

Her mother had always used egg money to buy extras for the children. No doubt, part of Ellen's finery had come from that source.

"The eggs will cook while you heat your coffee and make your toast," Mrs. Craig continued.

Nancy sat down to help with the pea shelling while her breakfast cooked. "It's wonderful to be home," she said with a relaxed sigh.

"But you still love your nursing, I hope," said her mother a bit anxiously.

"More than ever. But I do wish I could work with children. It's beginning to look as though I'll have to go away for special training. I've saved a little money, but not enough. I was hoping I could get on the children's ward at Downer, because that would give me the special training I need."

"I wish your father could help, but with Ellen ready for college next year, and Mike not far behind, he'll be strained to the limit."

"He doesn't look well, Mom. He ought to get more help in the store—"

"I tell him that, but he won't listen to me—says he can't afford but one clerk, with the help he has from Mike afternoons and Saturdays."

Her mother didn't try again to probe for an explanation of her coming home so unexpectedly and, in relief, Nancy decided to let the subject lie dormant. She began to chat of her old friends here at home. She asked who the young people were dating, and for news of those who had married or were about to be married.

"Nell Dawson phoned early this morning—said she saw you passing yesterday—and she wants you to come to a shower this afternoon that she's giving for Patty Wren."

"So Patty's succeeded in getting Jeff Barton! They've been going together since grammer-school days."

"Yes, at last. They're to be married in two weeks. It's a kitchen shower. I phoned your father to bring you something from the store."

"I'd like to see the old bunch again. We used to have lots of fun."

But at the party that afternoon Nancy found herself no longer attuned to the irresponsible drifting of her old friends. Her life had been too one-pointed and purposeful for a long time. Here the girls seemed merely marking time until the right man came along.

Everyone wanted to know how long she was going to stay. She always answered evasively, "I'm going to take a real rest this time."

Once when she said that to some friends who had called, her mother looked at her again with that puzzled expression. Nancy had not yet been able to face her problem squarely, to work out a solution. Was she a coward? she wondered.

On Saturday morning she had letters from both Sue and Carol. Carol, in her fresh and peppy style, came straight to the point.

I had a chance today to speak to Dr. Barrow about your being shipped. You wouldn't admit it, but I had a hunch he slipped a cog the morning after his drinking bout, and you're taking the rap for his mistake. Anyhow, I told him how washed up you felt, and that I was afraid you would lose your self-confidence as a result.

Nancy was provoked over the letter. She wouldn't for the world have Dr. Barrow think she had implied any such thing to Carol; yet at the same time, she was grateful to Carol for her concern.

Sue's letter was shorter. She expressed her regret at what had happened and advised Nancy to come back and take the first private nursing job she was offered.

Nancy put the letters aside. She appreciated what

her friends were trying to do, but she knew that she must make her own decision.

Nancy spent the early hours of Saturday morning giving the living room and dining room a thorough cleaning. Ellen sailed down the steps as Nancy was polishing the living-room furniture.

"Oh, darling, it's wonderful to have you here to help Mom, while I'm so tied up with all these graduation affairs. Even on Saturday morning we have to rehearse for our play."

Ellen had that charming combination of large brown eyes with long dark lashes and a head of shining auburn hair. She was beautiful as she stood there in the lower hall, in spite of doing everything possible to make herself look like a toughie in blue jeans rolled halfway to her knees, and a loose-tail shirt, one of the loudest Nancy had ever seen.

Mrs. Craig had said as Nancy started the cleaning, "We can't count on Ellen for anything right now. She's completely preoccupied with her schoolwork and her friends."

Ellen went blithely on her way in the family car while Nancy finished the lower floor. She still had some finishing touches to do when the phone rang. When she answered it, Mike's voice sounded high-pitched and nervous.

"Sis, Dad's awful sick, all of a sudden. You'd better come down as quick as you can."

"What is it? What's wrong?"

"He can't breathe good; says he has an awful pain in his chest. His lips are kinda blue."

"I'll be right down. While I'm getting there, call Dr. Meyers."

"I've already called him. He's out in the country somewhere—"

"All right, I'm coming!"

Nancy didn't even take time to tell her mother, who was down in the garden gathering vegetables. She ran out the door and up the street toward the

hardware store, three blocks away. Ellen seemed always off in the family car when it was most needed.

One look at her father in the old rocker at the back of the store, and Nancy knew it was a heart attack. Her fingers on his pulse revealed his heart beating at a spasmodic rate. He must have relief at once.

"Dad, try to relax a minute while I run to the drugstore for something," she said, wiping the beads of perspiration from his forehead.

She hurried two doors down the street to the drugstore. First, she asked to use the telephone, as she wanted to call Dr. Meyers out of her father's hearing. When she got his office, Ann Merton told her that the doctor was out on a maternity case.

"Could I possibly get him by phone?" asked Nan.

"They don't have a phone, and I'm afraid it will be a long labor case—Mrs. Sullivan's generally are."

Nancy put down the phone and turned to Mr. Burton, the druggist. She explained the situation, and told him what she wanted. Her second case after she graduated had been a heart patient, and she was pretty sure what should be done.

Five minutes after she gave her father a pill his tense face began to relax, and the agonized look went out of his eyes. She sat beside him, her hand on his pulse until it began to slow down.

At last she got up. "You rest there, darling," she said, "while I send Mike home for some things."

With a glance at Mike she signified that he was to follow her. When they were behind some tall showcases, the boy broke down.

"Gosh, Nan, I thought he was going to die! He would have, if you hadn't known what to do."

Nancy saw the unabashed tears on the round, freckled cheeks and gathered her brother in her arms.

"It was a narrow shave," she admitted. "And the worst isn't over yet. He mustn't be moved. I'm going

to fix a bed for him on that cot in the old back room. Go home in the truck and get a good innerspring mattress off one of the single beds, and at least three pillows. Don't frighten Mom when you tell her what's happened."

When Mike had gone, Nancy hurried back to her father. Uncle Ben, who was her father's assistant in the store, had gone out to buy the weekly groceries for his family. When he came in, he was stunned to learn what had happened. Uncle Ben was a lanky man who wore suspenders and trousers that always looked too big for him. He had never been able to make a success in business, and his brother was still boosting him through life.

"I've been telling Walt he ought to take it easier," drawled Uncle Ben, who had never believed in overwork. "A man can't keep on burning the candle at both ends like that."

A few minutes later the truck returned. Mrs. Craig was on the front seat beside Mike, her face strained and anxious.

Uncle Ben helped Mike take in the mattress, and Nancy and her mother followed with the pillows and bedclothes. For the next few minutes Nancy's mind was completely occupied with making a comfortable bed for her father. Uncle Ben and Mike lifted the old rocker close to the bed.

"I can walk! I can walk!" exclaimed Mr. Craig irritably.

"Not one step!" ordered Nancy, in her most professional manner. "You're going to stay right here on this bed until Dr. Meyer comes."

He had to yield, with irritated murmurings.

"You mustn't even waste energy getting irritated with us," Nancy warned. "There now, you see, even that has made you tired."

He had to admit that the bed felt good. Nancy took off his shoes and covered his feet with a blanket, but she was afraid to try to take off his clothes.

"Aren't we lucky to have our wonderful girl home to look after you?" said Mrs. Craig brightly.

"She didn't come home to work, but to rest," grumbled Mr. Craig. "I don't know why I had to cut up like this."

"The Lord's blessing she's here, Walt," said his brother, "with Doc Meyers traipsing all over the country delivering babies."

It was two hours later before the doctor arrived. He sauntered in with joking remarks to Mike and Ben, as if he were not arriving to hold off death.

Nancy hovered near while he checked her father. She watched intently as he listened through his stethoscope and counted her father's pulse.

"You're a lucky man to have Miss Nan here in the emergency," said the doctor. Then he turned to Nancy and asked what she had given him.

When Nancy explained, also mentioning that she had nursed a similar case for two months, he smiled warmly. "If I'd been here myself, you couldn't have followed my instructions more carefully."

While the doctor took out his pad and wrote a prescription, Nancy realized for the first time that she had been aware of no lack of self-confidence as she told the druggist what she needed for her father. It gave her the first hope that her recent experience might not have undermined her trust in her own ability.

"Give that as directed," said Dr. Meyers, handing Nan the prescription. "Now, young man," he added, turning to Mr. Craig, "you're going to have to take that rest you should have taken long ago. For twenty-four hours at least you're going to stay right where you are. Ordinarily I'd take a fellow in your shape over to the hospital at Summerton, but with your very capable daughter here to look after you, you might be better off at home. I'll give you a chance to rest tonight and in the morning I'll give you a thorough examination before I make a decision."

It was not until late in the afternoon that Nancy remembered Terry. She would have to phone him not to come tomorrow, for she would have to spend the entire day with her father. It wouldn't be fair to Terry to let him drive all the way up here, when perhaps she could only have dinner with him. She had planned to take a long walk with him up the hill to the little spring feeding the stream that flowed toward the valley. There was a view at the top of the hill that was breath-taking, and Terry loved views as much as she did. It was a deep disappointment to realize that his visit must be postponed. But her father came first just now—and her duty as a nurse.

CHAPTER SIX

Sunday morning, after an almost sleepless night at the store, Nancy prepared her father for the cardiogram. Dr. Meyers had no occasion to give her directions, for she supplemented his work with quick and accurate understanding of what needed to be done.

"It would be nice to have someone like you to help me in my office," the doctor said as Nancy made the connections over the heart area, wrists, and ankles.

She flashed him a grateful smile as she straightened from her task.

"Guess I'm lucky to have a daughter trained for the job," said the patient, trying to put up a bold front. "Hope she doesn't charge too much for her services."

Nancy roughed his hair with a gentle, caressing gesture. "You old darling," she said warmly, "you paid for anything I might ever do for you long ago." Then she bent and kissed him lightly on the forehead.

"Watch out there," warned Dr. Meyers, a twinkle

in his eyes. "You mustn't do anything to run his heartbeat up."

The doctor switched on the electricity and started the machine. With hands that shook a little, Nancy picked up the tape to watch results as it rolled out. She knew enough to realize that the irregular marks spelled a bad condition. Just how serious it was she didn't have enough experience to know. When Dr. Meyers took the end of the tape she stepped over to where she could look down into her father's face and smile reassuringly.

As she chatted with him about trivial things, she glanced from time to time at the placid face of the old country doctor. If he was disturbed by what he saw, there was no outward evidence of it. But that was small consolation to Nancy, for she knew that doctors were trained to hide what they felt from their patients.

She knew also how to control her own feelings when she had to. Her hands were quite steady a few minutes later when she replaced the wires and buttoned her father's shirt. He still wore the clothes in which he had been taken sick, for until a check was made the doctor didn't want his patient moved any more than was necessary.

She finished packing up the machine while Dr. Meyers pulled a chair up beside the cot, and faced his patient for a reckoning.

"Now, Walter," he said, "I'm not going to send you to the hospital this time. With such an expert nurse here to look after you, I can send you home. I know how you'd worry over the expense—thinking you'd be taking money away from that daughter of yours who's heading for college next year."

"Well, that's a load off my mind," said Walter Craig. He even managed a smile.

Nancy was grateful, too, but a bit afraid. Was she worthy of the confidence Dr. Meyers placed in her? What would he think if he knew she had been dismissed from her job at Downer Hospital? She

wondered if she was being quite honest with him in not explaining the situation. If she had really felt that she was guilty she would have been forced to do so, but she still couldn't bring herself to accept the blame for something she had not done.

As the doctor was closing his bag, he said, "I'll have an ambulance here in about an hour. You may as well make up your mind in the beginning, Walter, that you've got to rest. There'll be at least a month in bed. After that you're going to have to take it easy for a long time."

"He's earned a rest," said Nancy brightly. "Now you'll have a chance, Dad, to get all those stamps you've been collecting put properly into your books."

"No stamp work for the first month at least—after that we'll see," conceded Dr. Meyers.

When the doctor had gone, Nancy left Uncle Ben to sit with her father while she went down the street to the drugstore to telephone home and prepare her mother for the arrival of the ambulance.

The street and drugstore had been unusually quiet when she went in, as it was the church hour. But as she started through the store after completing her call, she realized that people were pouring forth from the church across the street. She still wore the blue chambray she had had on yesterday when she had come down so hurriedly to see about her father, and she decided to wait in the back of the store until the street had cleared of cars and churchgoers.

Mr. Burton stopped by to ask about her father. Nancy was in the midst of giving him the morning developments when she became aware that Ellen had come into the drugstore with another girl and two boys. Obviously they had been to church and had stopped in for a cold drink before going home. It gave Nancy a jolt to see Ellen laughing and talking as flippantly as if her father were not at death's door a short distance down the street.

Nancy would have to pass directly by their table on her way to the front door. Just then she felt too

furious with her beautiful but irresponsible sister to trust herself to speak civilly.

She turned to Mr. Burton. "I'm not dressed to be seen by all these churchgoers," she explained. "If you don't mind I'll slip out the back door and down the alley to Dad's place."

"Why sure, but you look very nice to me," said the druggist, escorting her through the labyrinth of packing boxes behind the drug department.

As Nancy went down the alley behind the stores of Main Street she wondered how much of her father's condition could be blamed on Ellen. She had not come in until after twelve any night since Nancy had been home. In fact, Nancy had seen very little of her, although the girls roomed together. Ellen had the attitude that everyone must cater to her plans, seeming unwilling to make any personal sacrifice, no matter what the circumstances.

Nancy thought of all the new clothes in the closet and what they must have cost her parents. She admitted that Ellen ought to have more than usual this spring, as it was her graduation season, but such an outlay should be expected only by a rich man's daughter.

A subdued family gathered at the dinner table two hours later. The boys spoke almost in whispers. No one but Ellen could think of anything to talk about except the tragedy that hung over the family. But Ellen chatted on as usual of the people she had seen at church and what they wore.

"Mom, I wish you could have seen Sandra's dress. It was simply adorable! And her mother made it. San said she'll lend me the pattern. It would be just the thing to wear to Jean's lawn party. Of course I'd want entirely different material from San's. Do you suppose you could get it made by Wednesday week—the party isn't till then?"

Ellen babbled on, blissfully unaware of how her self-centeredness grated on the others. But before Mrs. Craig could answer, Mike exclaimed scornfully,

"You're crazy! Mom has no time to sew for you, with Dad sick upstairs. But maybe you don't even know that!"

"Why—why you unsufferable little snip!" exclaimed Ellen, her eyes filling with tears. "As if I'm not as scared about Dad as anybody else."

Nancy had an impulse to mention how lighthearted she had seemed as she came giggling into the drugstore that noon, but she knew that would only distress her mother.

"Then, why don't you do something about it?" challenged Michael. "Instead of going off and leaving Mom with everything to do—dinner to cook, room to get ready for Dad, and everything."

"Now, Mike, there was no need for all of us to miss church," said his mother patiently. "We got along fine, and Ellen's going to do the dinner dishes."

"Oh, Mom, I'm sorry! If we'd had dinner as early as we always do, I could have. But I've scarcely fifteen minutes to get into another dress before Sammy's coming to take me to the Horse Show at Aiken."

At this, Nancy lost her patience.

"Then you aren't willing to make even one little sacrifice to help in the emergency?" she asked, iron in her tone and glance.

"Why—why I am, too!"

"There's been no evidence of it so far. You loitered around the drugstore for nearly an hour after church, when you should have been here helping with dinner."

"So you were spying on me!" flared Ellen.

"No, I had more important things to do than spy on you. I happened to be in the drugstore when you and your friends came in, and I also know that you didn't come home until over an hour later—after the ambulance had brought Dad here."

"I can't see where there's anything wrong in getting a drink in the drugstore on a hot day."

"Not in itself . . . Nor any harm in going to a horse show, except that you're badly needed at home.

Right now Mom needs to rest, after sitting up all night with me there back of the store. I was hoping you'd take over a little while after dinner while she gets a nap and I have a chance to take a bath and change my clothes."

At this Ellen flounced up from her chair. She clutched the back of it a moment as she glared across at Nancy. Though her eyes were blazing, her lips were quivering.

"All right, I'll call off the date! And—and I've been looking forward to this show for weeks—" She dissolved into tears as she started toward the door.

"Oh, darling, I hate for you to—"

But Ellen had already run from the room. In the embarrassed hush that followed they could hear her dialing a number with angry vigor, and a moment later she was calling off her date in the tone of a martyr.

"Oh, I hate for her—"

"Mom, you've all been too indulgent with her. You go right upstairs and leave this to her. People will be coming in to ask about Dad, and you'll need some rest first." Nancy took her mother's arm and started her toward the stairs, giving her no opportunity to linger around and help Nancy with the work.

Mrs. Craig had moved her things over into the guest room, leaving their room for the patient. When Nancy had her comfortably settled on the bed, she went in to see about her father. As she tiptoed in, she found him propped on two pillows, staring at the ceiling.

"He's thinking too much—and worrying," she said to herself, and made up her mind that someone must be with him as much as possible.

She had brought up the morning paper, and now she unfolded it, saying, "Would you like a few of the headlines?"

"I guess so, honey. Maybe it'll keep my mind from going round in circles."

She read for a half hour, with occasional comments passing between them. When she had heard nothing from him for several minutes, she glanced over to find him peacefully sleeping. She lowered the paper and leaned her head back against the cushioned seat. She must have dozed herself, for she jumped to awareness when she heard the door creak as Ellen came in. Then she saw that her father had roused already and had been lying there looking at her. She felt chagrined that he had caught her napping.

"You're worn out, honey," he said. "Run on and get some rest. You've been on duty over twenty-four hours."

"I'll just run out and get a bath and change my clothes while Ellen sits with you."

"I don't need anybody. I can ring this little bell you gave me if I need anything. Ellen has every minute filled."

"I have a date with you this afternoon," Ellen said, as sweetly as if the service hadn't been forced on her.

That's how she wraps people around her finger, Nancy thought, as she hurried off to run her tub of hot water. It felt wonderful to stretch her tired body in the relaxing bath. A few minutes later she put on her housecoat and got into bed. She scarcely remembered pulling a sheet up over her before she was asleep.

Then suddenly she was wide-awake again, staring at the clock, shocked to see that it was four o'clock. She had slept over an hour. Her first thought was of Terry. If they could have carried through their plans, they would probably now be standing on the hilltop above the spring. She was filled with a warm, aching longing for him. Why hadn't she specified a day for him to come later, she wondered? But yesterday afternoon, when she had phoned to call off the date, there had been too much uncertainty over her father to make any definite plans.

She heard a soft rap on the door. Then Ted cracked the door open and said in a stage whisper, "Sis, some guy wants you on the phone."

Nancy's heart was racing as she stuck her toes into her slippers and hurried down the back stairs. It must have been the telephone ringing that had awakened her. When she picked up the phone, she heard Terry's voice.

"You seemed so upset yesterday," he said, "I called back to see what the report is on your father."

"He's much better, Terry. And we have one thing to be thankful for—Dr. Meyers is going to let me nurse him here at home, instead of at the hospital."

"If they'd brought him here, I could have seen you . . . But then of course that would mean his condition is worse than it is—so I'm glad."

"I was so upset yesterday I didn't ask if you can come another Sunday—next Sunday, if you can make it. I have lots of help here, looking after Dad."

"I'd like very much to come, if that won't be too soon."

"Then I'll be looking for you," she said, trying not to show too obviously how delighted she was.

When she put down the phone and went slowly back to her room, she was thinking how anticipation of his coming would boost her up through the coming week.

CHAPTER SEVEN

On Monday Nancy settled into a regular nursing schedule with her father. She wanted to spare her mother as much as possible while she was home. Even if her father got up and around again, she knew he would be her mother's special care the rest of his life.

Her greatest problem was over-solicitous friends, who came to call or telephoned all during the day, so that one person was kept constantly busy with this. The boys were a great help with the telephone when they came in from school, but, as usual, Ellen was out constantly, only staying home long enough to eat and get a little sleep.

On Tuesday Nancy had letters from both Sue and Carol saying that Terry had told them about her trouble.

We're doubly sorry, Sue wrote, *for we've been hoping you'd be back in a few days.*

And Carol wrote, *Seems a shame for you to have the expense of keeping up your share of the apartment rent when you're not here, but we surely hope you'll be coming back to us before long.*

Nancy's mind had been so occupied with various things since she had left Summerton that she had given no thought to the fact that she would have to continue bearing her share of the expense in order not to lose her place with her friends. She couldn't entirely give up the idea of going back to Summerton, in spite of the impasse she had reached.

She thought of what Dr. Meyers had said about her working for him. He had a small clinic where he took care of emergency patients, but this was not the kind of work she had set her heart on doing. A vision flashed up of the long ward with Terry presiding over the rows of tiny beds, where small faces brightened at the approach of any nurse or doctor. This was her dream of ideal service. She had little patience with the numerous detours that were making her goal so hard to attain.

Even if Dr. Meyers did make her a good offer, she felt she shouldn't accept, because it would mean living at home. She knew there would be friction with Ellen. Her parents had spoiled the girl outrageously these last few years, and she wouldn't be able to avoid expressing her opinion, which would only cause more trouble. After all, it was her parents'

responsibility, and she might only make matters worse by interfering.

That week seemed very long to Nancy. The only time she went out was late in the afternoon. Then her mother came up to sit in the sickroom while Nancy drove to Main Street to do the marketing for the next day. Saturday afternoon she took special pains with her shopping list, remembering all the things that Terry liked. She bought young fryers, fresh asparagus that had been cut that morning in the fields just beyond Glendale. There were new potatoes, and home-grown strawberries for a short-cake.

Everything looked promising for Terry's visit. Anna Craig had engaged a girl to help in the kitchen and with the cleaning. This would leave her free to look after her husband while Nancy entertained her guest.

On Sunday morning Nancy was ready early. Downstairs in the hall she paused to look at herself in the floor-length mirror. She felt fresh and properly dressed in a cool blue shantung. She had taken an hour off on Saturday to have her hair done, so today it was soft and wavy about her face, with a golden sheen in the rich auburn tones. As she shifted her position, a portrait of Ellen, hanging on the opposite wall, came into view. Until that moment she had been almost satisfied with her looks, but now the contrast gave her a jolt.

Ellen was really beautiful, with perfectly chiseled features, fresh skin, and eyes that were always ready for laughter. By contrast, Nancy seemed very plain and serious. She knew she could only claim the freshness and good looks common to all well-groomed young people. She would have been comforted just then could she have known what so many of her patients had already discovered—that the look of compassion her face so often wore gave it an almost unearthly glow, and that her smile was like sunshine.

Her spirits slightly dampened, Nancy went to the garden to gather flowers for the dinner table. There

were roses, larkspur, nasturtiums, and fragrant crab-apple blossoms. She filled her basket and started toward the house, thinking how perfect it would be if Terry arrived just now.

But events took no such romantic turn. The table was set, the flowers arranged, and at half-past twelve Nancy was about to give up hope of his coming. A little disheartened, she went back to the kitchen to inspect the dinner in the warmer, and found that Cora had made a failure of the chicken gravy. The rice would be useless without the gravy, so Nancy pulled down a coverall apron, and proceeded to doctor the gravy.

She was just stirring the greasy concoction with a big spoon when she heard Ted calling as he came down the hall, "Nan, here's your fellow!"

Nancy felt a wave of embarrassment as he said the last word and pushed the swinging door inward. Then to her consternation she saw that Terry was directly behind Ted. There was nothing to do but make the best of an awkward situation. With a laugh she waved her spoon and exclaimed, "Hi-ya, fellow! I'm just doctoring the chicken gravy."

He stepped into the kitchen and bent over the stove beside her, peering at the huge platter of fried chicken.

"Oh, boy—my favorite!" he murmured.

And so they were off to a good start, and Nancy made up her mind not to worry over any further hitches that might come. But all her brave resolutions didn't quite prepare her for the complication that arose during dinner. The meal went off fine at first. The boys pulled only a couple of boners. Ellen, of course, was at her most charming, as she always was when there was a good-looking man around. She was so friendly, in fact, that Nancy had a few uneasy twinges. Ellen might take Terry away from her if she tried hard enough.

All went well, however, until Cora, the new maid, came in to clear the table for dessert. Nancy thought

she had coached her perfectly, for Cora had worked more in the fields than in homes. She had asked her specifically if she knew what to do before serving the dessert.

"Yas'm," Cora had said proudly. "You clears every las' thing off the table."

"Except the dessert forks, the water glasses, and the flowers in the middle of the table," Nancy prompted.

But to her consternation, when her mother pressed the bell for the table to be cleared, Cora came in with the enormous dishpan braced against her hip with her left hand. Nancy missed her entrance, and only became aware of the situation when she saw Mike's eyes bulge and an appalled expression come over his face. She saw the dishpan at about the same time Terry did.

"Cora!" she exclaimed. "Not that way!"

The shock the entire family felt went round the table like an electric current, but Terry promptly broke the circuit by saying, "That's the most sensible thing I've seen in many a day. Why take things back on a tray when you can put them directly into the dishpan, and save a lot of energy? If Cora was in one of these modern industrial plants, she'd be given a medal for a labor-saving device."

With this, everyone broke into laughter, and their embarrassment was forgotten. When the strawberry shortcake had vanished, and the family and their guest rose from the table, Nancy said, "Mike, how about showing Terry the fish-pond and garden while I give Dad his dinner?"

"Sure thing," agreed Mike.

"Wouldn't you like to see my rabbits?" asked Ted.

"You bet!" exclaimed Terry, putting an arm over Ted's shoulder and following Mike out.

While Nancy was arranging her father's special diet on a tray, Ellen strolled into the kitchen.

"He's a swell guy," she said. "Where'd you find him?"

"Oh, we've been friends ever since I was a junior in training."

"That sounds serious! But what's wrong? Been going with him three years and nothing's come of it yet?"

"Last year he interned in Missouri."

"Maybe he found a girl out there."

"Maybe so." Nancy had no intention of revealing the state of her feelings to Ellen.

"You don't even sound like you care! If you don't want him, I'd like to make a try for him myself."

"He's eight or ten years older than you."

"Just the same, he thinks I'm stunning looking—he said so."

Nancy was annoyed with herself for feeling so irritated. She picked up the tray and started out without saying anything more. Perhaps it was the realization of the contrast between them that had been in the background of her thoughts.

"How did the dinner turn out?" her father asked eagerly, interested as always in anything that concerned his children's affairs.

"Fine, until Cora came in to serve the dessert," Nancy said, and told him what had happened. She could laugh with her father, now that the experience was over.

Her father still had to be kept flat on his back, so Nancy fed him slowly, chatting as she did so. Later, when she went to the bathroom for the basin to bathe his hands and face, she glanced out the back window to see how the boys were getting along with Terry. To her surprise, Mike and Ted were nowhere to be seen. Ellen had taken over, and was sitting beside Terry on the bench facing the lily pool.

For a moment she was ashamed of the resentment that washed over her. Ellen was only helping out in entertaining her guest. She should appreciate her sister's thoughtfulness, she supposed.

But the beauty of the day seemed dimmed for

her as she turned from the window. Filling the basin with water, she returned to her father's room.

Nancy had just gone downstairs when the doorbell rang. She hurried to the door, feeling a little impatient at any delay that kept her from Terry. To her amazement, she saw Dr. Barrow standing just outside the screen door.

"Dr. Barrow!" she exclaimed. She unhooked the screen and stretched out her hand to him. "What a surprise!"

"I had a hard time finding your place. Didn't know you really lived in the country."

"Glendale would be insulted to hear you call it country. We're a part of the town, even if we are on the outer edge. But come in." Then the realization of Terry's being here struck her with a thud. "Why didn't you let me know ahead, so that you could have had dinner with us?"

"Well, I only found I could make it a couple of hours ago. Wanted to go over to Aiken to the Horse Show, and I thought maybe you'd enjoy riding over with me."

"That's sweet of you," she said. "But I have company here for the day."

She devoutly hoped that he would be on his way before Terry came in from the garden. In fact, she hoped that neither would know the other was here. But no such luck for her! At that very moment she heard Terry and Ellen coming in through the back hall. A wave of panic swept over her. Terry had already shown evidences of jealousy of the senior doctor. What would he think now at finding him in her living room?

She could hear Terry talking to Ellen as they came through the open archway that separated the entrance hall from the living room. He broke off sharply, to exclaim, "Well, Dr. Barrow, this *is* a surprise!"

"Why—hello, Terry!" exclaimed the doctor, just as surprised as Terry was.

Nancy began to explain, a bit too hurriedly, "He stopped over to see us on his way to the Horse Show in Aiken."

"Thought maybe she'd go along with me. I didn't know she had company," explained Dr. Barrow, a bit crestfallen, "But say, Terry, you shouldn't be greedy. Here're two lovely girls. You should let me have one of them."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Dr. Barrow," Nancy broke in. "This is my sister, Ellen."

"Well now, it doesn't seem quite fair to have two such charming girls in one family," he said, taking Ellen's hand.

Nancy stole a swift glance at Terry's face. Its enigmatic expression was far from comforting. Had she ever been in such a fix? She couldn't bear to slight Dr. Barrow, nor could she remain unconcerned at Terry's obvious unhappiness.

But she found herself saying to Dr. Barrow, "Can't you stay long enough to have some strawberry shortcake? They all seemed to enjoy it at dinner."

Dr. Barrow made a deep bow. "That's quite an inducement," he said, laughter crinkling his eyes. "And I don't think I'm going to turn it down—even if I'm late for the show."

"It's food for the gods," Terry said.

Nancy returned from the kitchen a few minutes later with a tray holding an enormous shortcake, heaped with stiff cream, and a glass of iced tea in which crisp green mint floated. She turned up a leaf of the old mahogany table and served Dr. Barrow there in the living room. To her amazement, when she looked around, Ellen and Terry were heading for the porch.

As she talked with the doctor she could hear the porch swing creaking rhythmically, and Ellen's excited chatter, punctured too frequently with her high, nervous laughter.

The doctor evidently heard it, too. He caught Nancy's glance and smiled. "They make a fine-look-

ing couple, don't they?" he said, with a wave of his hand toward the porch.

She realized then that he thought Terry was Ellen's date.

He seemed in no hurry at all, and she knew that with the slightest encouragement he would stay on for the afternoon. The very idea sent waves of panic running through her.

"Well, I suppose I'll have to be going," he said tentatively, some time after the strawberries were finished but with obvious reluctance.

Pulled between her instinctive hospitality and her fear that he wouldn't go, Nancy followed him out to the porch. And when he had at last driven away, she sat down on the swing beside the others, feeling definitely deflated.

The car was scarcely out of sight when Ellen exclaimed, "Where'd you latch on to him?"

"I haven't latched on to him," Nancy retorted.

"He's a regular Beau Brummell! But he must be at least forty-five—"

"Well, all of us will reach that age if we live long enough."

"Want me to referee?" asked Terry in a tone that was not entirely joking. "Why don't we take that walk to the boiling spring you told me about?" he added.

"Do let's," agreed Nancy. "I need to walk off some steam."

"That would be fun," Ellen chimed in.

Nancy's heart sank. The day was ruined. All her plans had gone askew. Maybe after all, though, it wouldn't be a bad idea for Ellen to come along, for she saw an argument brewing in Terry's eyes. During their climb to the top of the hill, which they had to cross before reaching the spring on the other side, she made several casual remarks about Dr. Barrow's dropping in so unexpectedly. But Terry didn't look too impressed.

During the rest of the afternoon she couldn't break

down the barrier that the doctor's visit had raised between them. When they returned to the house, Ellen's date was waiting for her. Even then, when they had a little time alone, Nancy couldn't get back on a spontaneously friendly footing with Terry. As he drove away just before six o'clock, she wondered when she'd ever see him again.

CHAPTER EIGHT

It was several days before Nancy could pull herself out of the depression left by Sunday's complications. She had just forced herself into a more cheerful mood about the middle of the week when a letter came in the morning mail from Terry.

She went over to the swing on the porch to read it, away from curious eyes. But she could have spared herself the trouble, for there was nothing in it to quicken her pulse. It was just a formal little note, thanking her for a pleasant day Sunday, and sending thanks to her mother for a very fine dinner. There was not one personal word, nor any wish expressed of seeing her again soon.

For a long time she sat clutching the note in her hand, and staring at the rose trellis. She tried to comfort herself by thinking that Terry was a poor correspondent, who found difficulty in expressing himself in writing. She recalled how seldom he had written her while in Missouri. Evidently he still felt he had no right to think of a girl seriously until he had paid up his old debts.

Suddenly she put the letter into the pocket of her dress and stood up with determination. If that was the way he felt, she wasn't going to ruin her life, and her time at home, pining for him.

She made herself hum a little tune as she went

upstairs to read her father's mail to him. There were two letters that must be answered, so she went back to the old typewriter in the boys' room. After that she tried to keep so busy there was no time for brooding. In the early afternoon when Hal Meyers, the doctor's son and an old classmate, phoned and wanted to take her to a square dance at the Community House on Tuesday, she readily accepted.

That was the first of numerous invitations from old friends. Nancy made herself accept as many as she could, without neglecting her father. She had plenty of help with him, however, for her mother shared the hours of watching over him, and the boys ran all sorts of errands for them after school.

During that week Dr. Barrow came into Nancy's mind almost as often as Terry did. She couldn't quite analyze her feeling about him. Was it Terry's seeming indifference that made her turn to the comforting thought that the older man cared for her a great deal? To have the admiration of a man of his attainments was something that shouldn't be taken lightly.

A letter came from him on Friday, and Nancy couldn't help comparing it with Terry's stilted thanks. After telling her how much he had enjoyed the strawberry shortcake, he wrote glowingly of the beautiful horses he had seen, and his regret that she wasn't along to share his pleasure. She answered both letters with equal friendliness, not failing to mention the dances, dinners, and picnic suppers she was enjoying with old friends.

Toward the end of the third week at home she had a letter from Sue reporting that she had seen Terry at a dance with Betsy Morris, one of the nurses on his ward.

"You'd better hurry back, old girl, if you don't want to lose out with those you like," Sue wrote.

If Terry was taking girls out to dinner dances, maybe the purse was not so pinched as it had been. It was beginning to look as if she were only soothing

her wounded pride by explaining away his indifference on the grounds of financial stress.

When her father had almost completed his four weeks in bed, Dr. Meyers agreed that he had improved sufficiently to sit up an hour or so a day.

"You two have done a fine job of looking after him," the doctor said that morning, after he'd checked his patient thoroughly.

"It's been Nancy," said Anna Craig, not taking any of the credit for herself. "I've felt satisfied that between you two Walter has had the very best attention."

"I'd like to keep Nancy here," said the doctor, "but I expect she's looking for a broader field."

"A nurse should be glad to serve anywhere she's needed," said Nancy, "but, you see, I really want to work with children. That's why I feel I ought to go back to Summerton."

It was in the next morning's mail that she had the letter from Dr. Barrow, asking her to come back and take over a patient of his.

> *This will probably be a long case,* the doctor wrote. *Mrs. Marshall is in her late seventies, a lovely person with plenty of money to keep a nurse as long as she needs one. There are no women in her family who can be with her. Besides a nurse who can administer her treatment properly, she needs the companionship of an understanding woman. You seem eminently fitted for the place. I hope your father has improved sufficiently for you to leave him, and that you can write me you will come soon.*

Nancy had stopped in the entrance hall to read the letter, but now she hurried back to the kitchen where her mother was setting bread to rise.

"A letter from Dr. Barrow!" she exclaimed, waving it at her mother and speaking with a lilt in her tone.

"He wants me to come back to Summerton and take care of one of his patients."

"Well, dear, I think your father's doing well enough for you to leave him—if you want to take the job."

"I'd like to very much," Nancy admitted, "if you think you can carry on with Dad from here."

And so it was settled that she would go in a few days. She sent a wire to the doctor, telling him she would report for duty on Monday.

"I'm sorry you can't stay on for Ellen's graduation," said Anna, when Nancy was packing, "but I know you have to answer the calls when they come."

Nancy thought this was her best chance to put in a word about Ellen, so she began cautiously, "After she finishes school, Mom, do try to make her feel some sense of responsibility around here."

"Maybe when you're gone, she'll realize her responsibility more."

"You've both been too easy on her—you've spoiled her outrageously," Nancy persisted.

"I'm afraid we have. But a girl's only young once."

"All those expensive things she has. Only a rich girl should expect so much. I've wondered if the financial drain hasn't helped put Pop where he is."

"No, no!" Anna denied quickly. "I've made the extra money in all sorts of ways—made dresses for other girls, sold eggs, flowers, vegetables."

"Then, that's just as bad—all that extra work on you just to pamper her. Really, Mom, you ought to try to make her realize, now that Pop will never be completely well again, that she can't go on having so much. You can't hold up under the strain of making extra money and looking after him."

"I know. It's worried me a lot. I wonder if we ought to try to send her to college at all, but she's so set on going."

"I'm afraid she only wants to go for the good time she'll be having. Maybe if she has to work her way through college, it will have a sobering effect on her.

If she really wants to get an education, she'll be willing to work for it."

After Nancy was on the bus going back to Summerton Sunday afternoon, she was glad she had spoken so frankly to her mother. Even before she left she had noticed that her mother was adopting a firmer attitude toward her younger daughter.

It was wonderful to be going back with definite work mapped out for her tomorrow. She felt the old zest rising, and renewed confidence in her own ability. She was grateful to Dr. Barrow for opening the way for her again.

To her surprise, when the bus pulled into the Summerton station, there was Sue waiting to take her to the apartment in her car. Nancy had considered making a down payment on a car with a little money she had saved, but after seeing conditions at home, she thought she had better hang on to her money in case of an emergency.

When she stepped down from the bus, Sue caught her in a bear hug. "You're an angel to come for me!" Nancy exclaimed. "Makes me feel like the welcome mat is really out."

"We missed you like all forty," Sue said. "I have the day off between patients, so I ran down for you —as you, my dear girl, have a dinner date."

"Playing private secretary, eh! And who with, may I ask?"

"Dr. Barrow said if you got here on time he wanted to take you out to dinner."

Nancy's thoughts had moved hopefully in another direction, but she tried to hide her disappointment as she said, "I guess he wants to brief me on my patient."

"It makes a nice excuse, anyway," said Sue, with a significant little laugh.

Sue gave Nancy news of the nursing world as she drove back to the apartment. She had had two patients at Downer during Nancy's absence and she passed on the latest gossip she had picked up there.

As soon as she reached the apartment, Nancy got in touch with Dr. Barrow and accepted his invitation.

"Now, what to wear," she pondered as she opened one of her suitcases.

"How about the blue nylon you got just before you went home?" asked Sue, lounging on Nancy's bed.

"That'll probably be the most suitable thing," agreed Nancy, remembering that one of the boys back home had told her the blue dress made her eyes seem almost blue.

She hung the dress in the bathroom to steam it smooth while she took her bath. She left the door partly open, and after she had run her water and was soaking in the tub, she called back to Sue, "Have you seen anything of Terry?"

"Not since that night he had Betsy out to dinner."

"Sounds serious." Nancy tried to speak lightly.

"You should worry," retorted Sue, "With Lord Byron as interested in you as he is."

"Oh, that's a different sort of interest."

"I don't care what sort of interest it is, I'd be flattered to pieces to have him pay so much attention to me—stopping by to see you at your home, calling you back for a special patient, and now a dinner date."

"He's really been an old dear ever since the day I met him," said Nancy, as she came from the bathroom a few minutes later.

"He's a wizard. I watched him operate the other day, and honestly his fingers can perform miracles."

Sue's attitude about Dr. Barrow made Nancy wonder if she herself hadn't been sufficiently impressed by his interest. So when he came for her, she tried to put all thoughts of Terry out of her mind, and give herself over to the enjoyment of being with him.

She felt a little self-conscious as she went out to

the expensive car. She hoped the date had no other meaning than to give her some highlights on the case she had come back to handle. But the dinner was almost over at the Savoy before he mentioned Mrs. Marshall.

"She's almost the last of a very wealthy family—one of the oldest in Summerton. They always seemed to attract money like a magnet. Her son was in business at one time with Terry Fenton's father."

"Well, Terry certainly didn't inherit any wealth."

"No, there was a breakup not long before Fenton's death. There was talk of Marshall doing him out of quite a bit of money, but I never pay any attention to that sort of gossip."

He switched off to talk about his recent trip to Aiken and the fine horses he had seen there.

"Didn't you say you liked to ride horseback?" he asked, settling back after his dessert to enjoy a cigarette.

"When I was growing up, and our place was still in the country, Dad used to keep horses. I rode anything from a mule on up."

He laughed. "I can see you were always very independent . . . I like to take a camera along when I'm horsebacking. Now that the weather's getting so warm I have a yen for the mountains. We could ride the trails on horseback and get some wonderful shots."

Nancy began to feel a bit wary. "There are precious few week ends a nurse can count on," she said. "And since you say the case I'm going on may be a long one, the prospect doesn't look too bright any time soon."

"You can always get a substitute for a few days," he reminded her.

"By the way—what about this Mrs. Marshall?" she asked. "What's wrong with her?"

"The general wearing-out that comes with age, aggravated by anemia. But she's a fine woman.

You'll like her, I'm sure. You're just the person for her—with your serenity and cheerfulness."

"Thanks," said Nancy.

"She's the last of her family, except one grandson. There are no women left in the family to look after her. And Bert's been in Europe for some time. He's paid her scant heed, as far as I can find out—except when he wants more money.

"But now I suppose he's heard it rumored that his grandmother hasn't much time left. He turned up here in Summerton about a week ago. I didn't know he was home when I wrote you about taking the case."

"What difference would that make?" she asked, puzzled.

"Since you'll have to live in the house with Mrs. Marshall, he may prove annoying."

"Annoying!" she repeated. "I'm certainly old enough to take care of myself, Dr. Barrow."

"Bert has a reputation as a heartbreaker!"

"Then I'll make my heart so hard he can't crack it," retorted Nancy, a twinkle in her eyes. "But I didn't realize this would be a full-time job."

"Of course she wants you to have time off every day—or evening—when you want to go out. But she needs a companion right now, as well as a nurse, and is willing to pay handsomely for it. She has a competent housekeeper who can take over when you're out. In fact, the housekeeper has even given her B12 shots. But naturally I'll feel better when you're there to take over."

"So she's taking B12. I saw something in a medical journal I've been wanting to ask you about—B12A being used as an antidote for cyanide poisoning."

"It's still in the experimental stage. If injected within four minutes after the poison, rats have been saved. I haven't heard of it being tried on humans yet."

"It's marvelous what all these new drugs are do-

ing," she said, her face glowing with interest. "Sometimes I wish I had the courage to go ahead and be a doctor. I'd especially like to do research work."

"You'd be excellent at it," he assured her, "with your exactness and care in obeying directions."

Suddenly she felt self-conscious again, wondering if he had said that merely to boost her morale after what had happened, or as an appeasement to his own sense of guilt. She could never feel natural with him as long as this feeling of doubt made a wall between them.

He wanted to go to a late movie, but she pleaded fatigue, and that she must start her job early tomorrow. Later he saw her to the little covered entry outside her door. Before she could open her purse to look for the key, he caught her hand and pressed it hard.

"It's such a comfort being with you, Nancy," he said. "Life seems worth living again."

With the slightest encouragement, she knew he would take her in his arms.

"It was lovely of you to take me out, and give me some highlights on my patient," she said hurriedly. "I'll try to do a good job with her."

Her hand wasn't quite steady when she found her key and unlocked the door. She was relieved to be inside a moment later, but she wondered how she was going to keep the situation under control in the future.

CHAPTER NINE

In the dew-wet freshness of a May morning Nancy left the taxi at the broad stone steps of one of Summerton's most beautiful homes. The driver had evidently been there before, for he turned without hesi-

tation into the semicircular drive that ran past the well-clipped lawn, banked with azaleas and camellias. Overhead, towering long-leaf pines hummed contentedly in the morning sunshine. Nancy had admired this place many times on drives into the suburbs, but she had never thought she would live here, even temporarily.

Her immaculate uniform and spotless white shoes had already proclaimed her purpose in coming here to the driver. He gallantly deposited her bags by the front door, and even rang the bell before doffing his hat and saying, "Sorry the missis is sick."

"Thanks for your interest, but how did you know?"

"I brought Mr. Bert Marshall in from the airport the other night, when he got back from Europe. Me and Bert used to play baseball together when we was in grammar school," said the driver, proud of his former association with the wealthy Marshalls.

He had just turned to hurry back to his cab when she heard someone coming. She closed her eyes a moment and said a quiet little prayer. As she took each new case, she tried to rededicate herself to the service to which she was offering her life. This morning she felt a special little thrill of excitement.

The door was opened by a butler, who bowed slightly before he spread the door wider.

"Yes, ma'am, Mrs. Marshall is expecting you," he said.

He stepped outside and picked up her bags. "This way, ma'am," he said, when he had closed the door. "I'll show you to your room."

In the brief interval Nancy had swept a glance over the magnificently furnished house, which seemed so ominously silent. Nothing could be heard except the ticking of the tall clock on the stair landing and the muffled sound of their steps as they mounted the deeply carpeted stairs. Nancy felt again

a thrill of excitement. She had never before stayed in a home where a butler presided.

Not far from the head of the stairs he showed her to an enormous, high-ceilinged room with four large windows. Two of these looked out on a formal garden that was opened each spring to sight-seers on the garden tours. She had visited these gardens the first year she was in Summerton at Junior College.

The butler placed her bags on suitcase racks. At the door he paused to say, "Mrs. Perkins, the housekeeper, will come up presently and take you to Mrs. Marshall."

When he had gone, Nancy stood in the middle of the room and looked around to her heart's content. The huge, four-poster bed was canopied. The hand-made crocheted bedspread would have been the envy of any collector. There was a fine walnut highboy between two windows, and an antique dressing table between the other two. A chaise longue was drawn up close to a window overlooking the garden. A slipper chair was near the bed, and not much higher than the steps against the side of the bed, used for mounting to the high resting place.

Nancy wondered why this world's goods were so unequally divided. Here was this huge place with only two people to rattle around in it, while her own home was packed to overflowing. Here, no doubt, they had more than they could ever spend, while poor Terry was struggling to pay up debts he had incurred for equipping himself to serve humanity.

She pulled herself out of her introspective mood, and opened her suitcases. She had hung a few dresses in the tall wardrobe when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," she said, crossing the room.

The door was opened by a substantial-looking woman of about fifty. Her hair was iron-gray and

looked very nice with the lavender chambray dress she wore.

"I hope you found everything all right, Miss—"

"Craig," Nancy supplied. "Nancy Craig. Oh yes, everything's lovely."

"I'm Mrs. Perkins, the housekeeper. I'll take you to Mrs. Marshall when you're ready."

"I'm ready now," said Nancy eagerly, dropping what she had been doing.

Mrs. Perkins led the way to a front bedroom, where they found a fragile little woman with snow-white hair propped among the pillows. She laid a small leather-bound book face down on the snowy spread when the housekeeper and nurse entered.

"Here's Miss Craig, Mrs. Marshall," said the housekeeper.

The sick woman looked straight at Nancy then, revealing brown eyes with great warmth and depth behind them. Here was no ordinary person, was Nancy's first thought.

As she was thinking it, the housekeeper added to her introduction, "I know you're going to like her."

Nancy smiled to cover her embarrassment as Mrs. Marshall said, "Of course I'm going to like her. Come closer, dear, so that I can have a better look at you. I get more nearsighted every day."

Nancy moved nearer to the bed and took Mrs. Marshall's blue-veined hand. Though it was cold and thin, the skin was satin-smooth—the hand of a woman who had never done any rough work.

"I'm glad to have you here, my dear. Dr. Barrow says you're a born nurse, and I can see you're a pretty one as well."

Suddenly Nancy felt certain that Mrs. Marshall didn't really need a nurse, that Dr. Barrow had created this place to get her back into circulation. And with the thought came another that she was ashamed of, the idea she had had before—that this was balm to a guilty conscience.

"I like to get up to eat my breakfast," Mrs. Marshall was saying.

"She won't let me coddle her, even though she's too weak to sit up long," said Mrs. Perkins. "She never would take coddlin'."

"Why should I?" asked the thin, birdlike voice pertly.

"You must let her help you get your bath," insisted Mrs. Perkins. "The doctor said you must spare yourself exertion. Now promise me you'll let her help you get your bath."

"I will! I will! You just run along about your own business."

When the housekeeper had gone, and Mrs. Marshall was sitting on the side of the bed, she said, "Bless her! She just has to pet people. She ought to have a half-dozen children and a dozen grandchildren, instead of just me, to look after."

Nancy quickly sensed how her patient was to be dealt with. By the time Mrs. Marshall was bathed, dressed, and sitting in the small, upholstered rocker by the front window, a satisfactory working basis had been established between patient and nurse.

"You can ring for my breakfast now," Mrs. Marshall told Nancy.

When Mrs. Perkins brought up the silver tray, there was an extra cup for the nurse.

"I thought you'd be ready for another cup of coffee by this time," Mrs. Perkins said.

"Thanks, I *would* like another. It seems a long time since I had breakfast."

"I never want breakfast," complained Mrs. Marshall, "but Dr. Barrow says I must eat. I suppose I'm paying for all the years I never ate unless I wanted to. I failed to give my body the proper nourishment, and now I'm paying the piper."

The invalid ate a few mouthfuls of toast and crisp bacon before she asked, "Do you like to read, my dear?"

"Oh, yes. But since I went into nurse's training

there's been little time for anything except reading connected with my work. Of course I read the medical and nursing journals thoroughly. I'm keenly interested in all the marvelous things the new drugs are doing to banish disease."

"You haven't read much philosophy then?"

"Not since my junior college days." Nancy laughed and added with her usual candor, "but, frankly, I thought the philosophers a little dry."

"I agree with you—the ones they poked at us at school. But have you read any of the Oriental philosophers?"

Nancy shook her head, and Mrs. Marshall added, "No! Then you have a treat in store. I hope you don't mind reading aloud."

"I love it! Back home on winter nights we were brought up on reading stories aloud to the family."

"That's nice. Then I can get caught up on my reading. My eyes have bothered me so much lately I haven't read half the things I wanted to."

When the breakfast tray was taken away, Nancy read to her patient for an hour. It was a translation of the teachings of Confucius. Nancy was amazed at the interest the sick woman showed, and at the astuteness of her comments. But she was too frail to keep her alertness long. Soon rhythmic breathing told Nancy her patient was asleep. But she read on in a low, soothing tone, surprised to find that she was interested herself.

The minute she stopped reading, however, her patient's eyes opened, and she said alertly, "Tired of reading, dear?"

Nancy had too much tact to tell her that she had been sleeping for the last fifteen minutes. Instead, she said, "It's almost eleven. Hadn't you better lie down and take a nap? Dr. Barrow told me you were to rest in the morning and the afternoon."

Nancy scarcely had her patient settled on the chaise longue when the housekeeper came in, announcing the doctor.

Dr. Barrow came in with his usual smile. "Well, Nan, it's a comfort to have you here," he greeted her.

"It's nice to be here," she assured him, and pushed further back into her mind the thoughts she had had that morning.

"I respect your good judgment more than ever, Dr. Barrow," said Mrs. Marshall. "Nancy's not only a good nurse, but an excellent reader—and there are an amazingly large number of poor readers in the world."

"Of course," agreed the doctor. "She's everything a nurse ought to be, and more."

It was the day for Mrs. Marshall's B12 shot. The doctor showed Nancy how he wanted it given; then he drew her aside to give her other directions about medicines, rest, and recreation.

"I want her to get out every afternoon, if she feels like it. Let her spend a couple of hours in the garden, or out riding. Try to protect her from long-staying company who may be irritating or boring."

At one o'clock, when Mrs. Marshall had had her lunch and had been put to bed for her nap, Nancy went down to lunch in the enormous, walnut-paneled dining room. She felt self-conscious sitting at the end of the long table, being served formally by Stephen. She enjoyed the excellent food, however, with the healthy appetite of the young, but it would have had more flavor if eaten with someone, she thought.

"Is Mrs. Marshall the only one in her family?" she asked the butler, curious to know what he would reply.

"Mr. Bert, the madam's grandson, is back from Europe, but he stayed with friends in Aiken overnight."

So that explained why she had neither seen nor heard anything from the family playboy. After lunch she had an hour's nap herself, then finished unpacking.

Mrs. Marshall was already awake when she returned to the front room, and was again immersed in the leather-bound book she had been reading that morning.

"I'd like to take a nice long ride this afternoon," she said. "That shot has me all pepped up again."

"It's heavenly outside," agreed Nancy. "What time shall I tell Stephen to bring the car?"

"In half an hour. I have only to put on a street dress and smooth my hair."

Nancy picked up the house phone by the bed and gave instructions to the housekeeper. Then she helped Mrs. Marshall to dress.

"Did you enjoy your lunch?" asked the old lady, with a hostess' eagerness to make a guest happy.

"Oh, very much. You have an excellent cook."

"Hattie can't be beat!"

"But it was lonely. Maybe the housekeeper would let me eat with her after this. It would be nice to have someone to talk to."

"Bert will be home tomorrow. I'm sorry he wasn't here to keep you company at noon."

"Your grandson, you mean?"

"Yes . . . He's a darling boy—and the only bit of family I have left in the world. My friends tell me I've spoiled him, and I suppose I have. But there's no sense in his working if he enjoys seeing the world. His father left him money, and my husband left plenty for us both."

Nancy wondered a little uneasily how it would work out, having her meals with the spoiled grandson of this wealthy old lady. She could think of no suitable comment as she hunted in the wardrobe for a light wrap for her patient, who seemed always to be chilly.

During the drive into the country Stephen circled the lake that had recently been opened for the summer swimming. Nancy told Mrs. Marshall how she had met Dr. Barrow there the first time. When they returned, Mrs. Marshall, remembering that

Nancy had been lonely at noon, had their dinner served on a small table in her room. Nancy enjoyed her dinner so much that she hoped this would be a permanent eating arrangement.

But next morning she had breakfast alone downstairs. There was still no evidence of Bert. When she went in to look after her patient later, however, she learned that he had arrived home last night around midnight.

"He'll be up in time to have lunch with you. He generally sleeps till noon when he's out late," explained Mrs. Marshall.

Nancy thought of Terry, who had been on duty since nine that morning; she felt small patience for this lazy grandson of an indulgent grandmother.

"You must get him to show you the things he sent home from the Orient. He served in Korea six months, and was nearly a year in Japan. He found those little leather-bound volumes of some of the Eastern philosophers in an old shop in Tokyo. But you must see the Ming vase and the Korean pottery. He has them in a cabinet in the east sitting room downstairs."

Nancy was glad to hear that Bert Marshall had at least rendered his share of service to Uncle Sam. Perhaps that had put some of the manhood into him that his soft upbringing had failed to develop.

CHAPTER TEN

Nancy was settling her patient for a nap after lunch when she heard a light rap at the door. Before she could answer it, the door was pushed open and in came a young man, jaunty in a silk sports shirt and light trousers.

"Good morning!" he exclaimed on seeing Nancy. "I suppose you're the new nurse?"

Mrs. Marshall lifted her head from the pillow. "Miss Craig, may I present my grandson, Bert Marshall. Bert, this is Nancy, the little nurse Dr. Barrow sent me. Isn't she lovely?"

"Oh, Mrs. Marshall!" exclaimed Nancy, her cheeks flushing. "Your grandson couldn't do anything but agree with you, no matter what he thought."

"I more than agree!" exclaimed Bert, his handsome, expressive face alight. "I didn't expect anything like this. I've always thought of trained nurses as being rather proper and prim. At least the ones who nursed me in Japan were."

"Then you were wounded?" asked Nancy almost eagerly, thinking that after all he had rendered some self-sacrificing service.

"Nothing so glamorous! I merely had flu that slipped into pneumonia. Can you imagine anything less heroic?"

Nancy laughed. Then Mrs. Marshall broke in to say, "Bert, take Nancy down to lunch. I'm afraid she had a very boring time yesterday, eating alone."

"I'd be delighted! Let's go. I'm simply ravenous!"

He caught her arm and marched her toward the door, with Mrs. Marshall's pleased little laugh speeding them along.

There wasn't a dull moment during the meal. With the slightest lead from Nancy, Bert was off on some fascinating yarn. He was not at all inhibited about his fighting experiences; yet there was nothing boastful about what he told. He talked with the zest of one who found life a great adventure, whether on the battlefield or in the remote spots where he had picked up antiques and rare old volumes.

Nancy watched his face as he talked. It was not the weak face of a playboy, as she had expected. It had the indefinable quality of a man of breeding and background. He had the poise of one who had had leisure to cultivate the things in which he was

most interested. When Nancy spoke, he had a way of giving her his entire attention, as if everything she said were of real interest to him.

When Stephen was clearing the table for dessert, Bert grew suddenly silent; then, after an interval, he asked, "But what about you? I've been babbling on endlessly about my affairs, but what have you done all my life?"

"Nothing, compared with your colorful experiences. I've always lived in Glendale and Summerton. As far back as I can remember, I wanted to be a nurse—and so I am."

"When you stay in one place and work toward a definite goal you have a chance to develop some stability and serenity. Trouble with me I've been interested in too many things. I've scattered myself all over the world."

When they had finished their dessert, he took her into the east sitting room to show her some of his collection. After an hour, Nancy reluctantly had to excuse herself, saying that her patient would be awake by this time and needing her.

She found Mrs. Marshall still sleeping, however, so she sat down by the open window, thinking of this man she had just met. With all his brilliance and versatility, she didn't envy the girl he would marry. How could one live at the pitch of excitement that seemed to be his constant state? She preferred the even, quiet way of someone like Terry. Then she jacked herself up. She had made up her mind to try not to think of him. Yet every man she met was measured by him. It wasn't fair to them, nor to herself. Why should she cut herself off from interest in other men to wait for someone who seemed to shy away from her at the slightest provocation?

She had found herself listening tensely several times when the phone had rung, with the half hope that it might be Terry calling. Before going to bed that night she phoned the apartment. Sue answered,

as Carol was out on a date. From her she learned that both girls still had patients at Downer Hospital, but neither had seen anything of Terry recently, for the pediatric wing was at the opposite end of the hospital from the wards where they were working.

Though she had enjoyed her first meal with Bert, Nancy did not see him again until three evenings later. On this occasion Mrs. Marshall was feeling so much better that she had dinner with them downstairs. The weather had turned unbearably warm for late May and it was much cooler downstairs than up.

"Dr. Barrow was saying this morning," Nancy remarked, glancing at Bert, "that if this weather continues, Mrs. Marshall should get away to the mountains or the shore for a while."

"Good!" He turned to his grandmother eagerly. "That's an excellent idea, Dearest. Why don't you let me drive you up to Asheville? Belair Inn would be a wonderful place to stay—quiet and cool. There's a fine stable there, where we could get saddle horses. Do you like riding, Nancy?"

Things were moving a little faster than Nancy had expected. She didn't relish the idea of leaving Summerton again so soon. As long as she was here, there was a possibility that she might see or hear from Terry.

So her answer was not too enthusiastic when she said, "Yes, I like horseback riding."

"Doc Barrow is crazy about horses, too. He'll probably come up some week end while we're there."

"It seems I'll have to go where there are horses, if I expect my grandson to drive us up." Mrs. Marshall smiled indulgently.

Plans shaped up rapidly after that. Bert was a man of action. By Friday noon they were comfortably settled at Belair Inn, with the sanction of

the doctor and a promise that he would join them some week end soon.

The inn was on a mountain slope overlooking a lush valley and the rolling golf course of a near-by club. The invalid was put in a quiet wing on the first floor. Only a few steps from their door was a porch that was almost private, for few guests had arrived this early in the season. They had been in the mountains almost a week when Dr. Barrow sent up another convalescing patient, a Mrs. Farrell, who was put in the same wing with Nancy and Mrs. Marshall.

Nancy rather regretted that they had to be closely associated with Mrs. Farrell. She found it difficult to rise above the woman's deep depression, which was evidently the aftermath of a recent operation. She often came out and sat on the porch with them, and Mrs. Marshall seemed to feel it her duty to try to brighten the woman's outlook. But it was evident to Nancy that she must have soured on life, even before her operation.

One afternoon toward the latter part of their second week at the inn, Nancy was sitting on the porch with the two women when Mrs. Marshall glanced up from her paper to say, "I see where an old friend of mine, Fanny Clayton, died. I'm so glad she could be released from her pain—cancer, long months of terrific suffering."

"That's one thing I wouldn't go through with!" exclaimed Mrs. Farrell, who sat nervously knitting a scarf for the Red Cross.

"Well, none of us can say that," said Nancy, feeling irritated with the woman. "If our end is to come that way, we just have to face it, that's all."

"Not me!" stated Mrs. Farrell, her narrow lips set firmly. "I'd take the quick way out."

"People never save themselves suffering by doing that," exclaimed Mrs. Marshall in a shocked tone. "Some of the Eastern mystics tell us that suicides go right on suffering as they had on earth until the

period that would have been their life span has expired. It's much worse than when they were here, for there they have no way of solving the problem that drove them to suicide."

"Fantasy! Pure fantasy! Nobody can know what happens on the other side!" exclaimed Mrs. Farrell, dismissing the subject.

"It sounds logical to me," said Nancy. "It's certainly true in life that we don't get anywhere by running away from our problems."

She made up her mind then that she would avoid bringing her patient on the porch during the hours when Mrs. Farrell came out. With the approach of the second week end, however, Nancy had many distractions to take the unhappy Mrs. Farrell out of her mind. Bert was coming up to Asheville again, and he was bringing Dr. Barrow with him. Also, Nancy had talked to Sue and Carol before leaving Summerton, and they had promised to come up for this week end.

Then, to her surprise, late Friday afternoon Nancy had a long-distance call from home. At first she had a moment of fright when the operator told her it was Glendale calling. Her first thought was naturally of her father. But he had been doing fine, according to her mother's letters. The minute she heard her mother's voice, she knew by its brightness that nothing was wrong at home.

"I hope I didn't frighten you, darling," said Anna Craig. "I just called to tell you that Ellen is on her way up there with Mr. and Mrs. Barnes, who are going up to their cottage. I hope you can get a room for her at Belair Inn."

"That's wonderful, Mom! She can room with me —I have twin beds in my room."

"The child is worn out from all the excitement of graduation, and she's really helped me since you left. A change will do her good. She's been wanting to go up ever since she heard you were going. They ought to be there about five-thirty."

As Nancy put down the phone she realized here was a new complication. She regretted having written in such glowing terms of her setup with the Marshalls. Perhaps her description of the handsome and versatile Bert had so appealed to Ellen that she wanted to meet him in person. She didn't feel that her parents could afford the price here, even for a week end. But by having Ellen share her room she could save some of the expense.

Mrs. Marshall had been keenly interested in Nancy's talk of her family, and she seemed pleased when she heard that Ellen was coming up.

"It'll be nice to meet another Craig," she said. "I'm doing so nicely here I don't want you to feel burdened with me over the week end—you must feel free to go out with your sister and your friends."

"You're an unselfish dear," said Nancy, "but I have no idea of neglecting you for anyone. I can be with them at mealtimes, and in the evening after you're in bed."

Ellen arrived soon after five, and Nancy was surprised to see how tired she looked. She felt a little guilty for begrudging her the cost of the trip.

"Get a warm bath and lie down for a while," Nancy directed. "We don't have dinner in the main dining room till six-thirty. I'm going to eat out there with you tonight. Mrs. Marshall and I have been having our meals together in her room."

"Don't let me upset your routine," said Ellen. "I'll scrape up an acquaintance with someone around here."

"There's no need of that. Sue and Carol are coming tonight. Carol, especially, will be raring to do things. But from your thinness I'd say you need rest more than anything else."

"You know me, Nan—too restless to rest."

At six-fifteen, when both girls had dressed for dinner, they went in to see Mrs. Marshall. Nancy had taken off her uniform for the first time since she had come to the inn. She wore a pale-green figured silk.

As they approached Mrs. Marshall's door, she realized that Bert must have arrived, from the chatter inside.

"Oh, the grandson must have come, too!" exclaimed Ellen, her eyes brightening.

As the girls entered the room, Nancy said, "Mrs. Marshall, this is my sister Ellen—and this is Mr. Bert Marshall, Ellen."

"Come closer, dear, so that I can see you," said the invalid, who was eating her dinner by a window. When Ellen's hand rested in her thin one, she added brightly, "Well, it seems all the Craigs are lovely to look at."

"That's putting it mildly!" exclaimed Bert. "They get prettier and prettier!"

Nancy laughed spontaneously. "Well, that's a compliment that backfired."

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Bert. "You don't expect to monopolize all the virtues, do you? Beauty, charm, efficiency, personality-plus?"

"All right! All right, that's enough!" Nancy had to laugh in spite of herself.

"Don't take him too seriously, girls," warned Mrs. Marshall. "But he does make life rather interesting, doesn't he?"

"I'll say," agreed Ellen, who had scarcely taken her eyes off Bert since they came in.

"Enough of flattery," Nancy told them firmly. "Come on, Ellen, we'll be late to dinner."

"Wait a minute! You don't think I'm going to eat alone when there are two such charming girls on hand?" exclaimed Bert.

"Did Dr. Barrow come with you?" asked Nancy.

"Yes, but he's all in, and is having dinner in his room tonight. He said I saved his life by driving him up. He'll see you first thing in the morning, Dearest." He bent and kissed his grandmother's forehead lightly before he took an arm of each of the girls and escorted them out.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Are you feeling better this morning?" Nancy asked Dr. Barrow, when he came in the next morning to see Mrs. Marshall.

"Fine!" replied the doctor heartily. "Nothing wrong with me last night that a good sleep couldn't help. I haven't had a full night's rest since the first of the week. Why people choose the middle of the night to have babies and heart attacks is more than I can see."

"Poor doctor," said Mrs. Marshall, taking his hand and patting it when he came to her bed. "I won't have them overworking you like that."

"I'm going to take it easy today. First I'll see how you're getting along, then I'll check Mrs. Farrell, before I'm off up the mountain on horseback."

"Is Mrs. Farrell your patient, too?" asked Nancy. The woman had been so secretive about her illness and her personal affairs that Nancy suddenly realized how little she knew about her.

"Oh, yes," Dr. Barrow said a bit grimly. "It works out nicely having two patients here—gives me an excuse to get away for an occasional week end."

Nancy stood watching while he checked her patient's heart and blood pressure. Later, as she was sterilizing the thermometer before returning it to its case, he said, "It seems that the climate here agrees with you very much." He glanced at Nancy. "She's doing fine, Nan. There's no reason why you can't come along with us today. We've engaged horses for the mountain climb."

"Thanks, Doctor," she said, "but I think I'd better stick to my job."

"Go along, dear. I'll be quite all right," urged

Mrs. Marshall. "Bert brought me a couple of new books to read."

"You've forgotten this is the day for your B12 shot."

"You can give that later," said the doctor.

But Nancy remained firm. "Bert invited Ellen last night," she told Dr. Barrow. "And he wants to include Sue and Carol, if they feel up to it. They had trouble with the car and didn't get here until nearly ten last night. How Carol had the nerve to drive on those lonely mountain roads after dark is more than I can see."

"Carol will undertake anything," said Dr. Barrow. "That girl has grit."

Nancy did leave her patient long enough at ten o'clock to see the mountain-climbing party off. Ellen had found she could rent a riding habit from a shop near the stables. Sue and Carol had come prepared, for it seemed obvious they knew the doctor's plans before they left Summerton.

"I wish you'd change your mind and come along," said Dr. Barrow, even after he had mounted his horse.

"I'll feel better staying here—and my hunch was right. Bert had a lunch packed, so I know it'll be afternoon before you get back. I'd be worrying about Mrs. Marshall by that time."

When they finally cantered off, Dr. Barrow and Carol were in the lead, and Bert followed between Ellen and Sue. Nancy was glad that Ellen had a chance for this experience. It would do her good to associate with some levelheaded adults. She was much younger than the others, but the group seemed congenial enough to overlook ages.

After they had gone, though, she couldn't help feeling a bit sorry for herself. But she saw, as soon as she returned to Mrs. Marshall's room, that her patient had wilted after the excitement of so many visitors. She raised no objections to staying in bed at Nancy's suggestion.

Nancy had noticed that just before the time for each vitamin shot her patient's vitality seemed to run very low, so she prepared the injection at once. Soon after she had given it, Mrs. Marshall began to look much brighter, and Nancy settled herself near by to read aloud.

She had been reading for perhaps a half hour when she heard someone running down the hall. Suddenly the door burst open and Sally, the colored maid who looked after the rooms in the south wing, dashed in. Her eyes were wide with horror as she exclaimed, "Come quick, Miss Nurse. Miz Farrell done tried to kill herse'f."

Nancy hurried out behind the girl. "What happened? What did she do?" she asked, when they were in the hall.

"Took poison, I reckon. Strychnine—that's what the bottle said. She was gulpin' down somethin' when I went into the room to clean up. She yelled at me all excited when I went in. 'Go 'way,' she says. 'Can't I even die in peace?' "

By this time they were at the room door, which the girl had left half open. Mrs. Farrell was lying on the bed, her legs and arms jerking convulsively, with the excited movements of an overstimulated person. Her face already had a purplish tinge and she glared at Nancy, who bent over the bed.

"Go away," mumbled the woman thickly.

"What did you take?" asked Nancy.

"Go away! Nobody asked you to come here. If any doctor thinks I'm going to die by inches of cancer he's mistaken." The woman's eyes rolled back in her head.

"What did you take?" Nancy repeated. But Mrs. Farrell seemed past answering. Nancy watched her collapse after a violent convulsion.

If she only had a stomach pump, she might get most of the stuff out of her stomach, now that the woman was past resisting.

She turned to search the bedside table. There was

a glass with a few drops of liquid in it, and a bottle marked strychnine, 1/40 grain tablets. She knew they were sometimes given patients as stimulants. But enough of them would put anyone out of business. With quick, almost mechanical computation, Nancy added up all the facts: Mrs. Farrell's remark that she would do away with herself rather than die a lingering death with cancer, and the doctor's early morning visit. No doubt she had decided from something he said that her recent operation had been for a malignant condition. She had probably come to the inn prepared to do this very thing, in case she learned the truth.

Nancy's mind was drawing all these deductions even as she discovered the strychnine bottle. She glanced again at the bed. There wasn't an instant to waste if she was to save the woman.

The maid stood gaping down at the bed with morbid curiosity. Nancy turned to her and said, "Go, tell them to send for a doctor. Send Mr. Barnes up here at once. I need him. Oh, and, Sally, make some very strong tea and bring it up. Tannic acid ought to help."

Even before the girl reached the door she remembered the antidote for strychnine. She knew morphine would counteract it, if she could only put her hands on some immediately. She dared not wait until a doctor could drive up to the isolated inn. At least she could get the hypodermic needle she used for Mrs. Marshall's B12 shots, and have it ready in case she could get some morphine. She ran back to Mrs. Marshall's room.

Nancy forced herself to a walk as she entered the room, but Mrs. Marshall sensed her excitement and asked anxiously, "What's wrong, dear? Can I help?"

"Mrs. Farrell's had a bad turn," she said, trying to speak calmly.

"I do wish I could do something."

"You stay right here. I have something here in my bag that may help her."

She picked up her small medical case and went out. She met Sally trotting along the hall, with Mr. Barnes close at her heels. He was breathless and excited.

"Could you locate a doctor?" she asked.

"I left the clerk to call. What is it? What happened?"

"It looks like Mrs. Farrell has taken strychnine. Do you have any morphine?"

"Morphine?" exclaimed the aggravated proprietor. "What would I be doing with morphine?"

"Many doctors give it to patients to relieve pain," replied Nancy with forced politeness. Even as she said it, her mind clicked clues into place like an adding machine. If Mrs. Farrell really had cancer, no doubt Dr. Barrow was already allowing her to have small doses of morphine to relieve her pain.

She glanced at her patient as she crossed the bedroom with the other two close behind her. The woman was lying quite still now, her eyes rolled back in her head, her breath coming in spasmodic gasps.

"Good lord!" exclaimed the shocked proprietor. "What did she do?"

"Took strychnine," Nancy repeated, "or so it seems. There's the bottle on the table, and her reaction was that of strychnine poisoning." While she talked, she put down her bag and began searching in the table drawer. "If I could only find some morphine—that's an antidote. Do you know of anyone in the inn who might have some?"

Mr. Barnes seemed too stunned to answer. He stood gaping a moment at the unconscious woman before he muttered, "Looks like she's dead now!"

"She will be before a doctor can get here, unless we can find some morphine immediately." Then as her hand fumbled among various medicine bottles and oddments in the drawer, she exclaimed, "Thank heavens—here's some!"

"Are you sure that's the right thing?" asked Mr. Barnes nervously.

Just then the room phone rang, and the maid, standing close by, answered it. When she put it down, she glanced at the proprietor and said, "De clerk say he can't locate no doctah. But dey promise to send somebody soon as he come in."

"She'll be dead before any doctor can get here now," said Nancy. "We've got to take a chance—"

"If she doesn't come out of it—what will people say? Investigation—" Mr. Barnes was fairly sputtering now in his apprehension. "All this publicity just when the season is beginning."

Nancy was suddenly furious. "This woman's life is of far more importance than the financial success of your inn, Mr. Barnes," she said coldly. "I know that morphine is a specific antidote for strychnine and—"

"I wash my hands of the whole thing!" exclaimed the florid-faced man emphatically. "Sally, you'll bear witness that I wash my hands of the whole thing."

"But us can't stand here and let 'er die!" exclaimed the girl.

"And I'm not going to," stated Nancy.

She hurried to the bathroom, prepared her solution and filled the needle. A moment later she was back by the bed. The terrified proprietor watched as she pushed up Mrs. Farrell's sleeve and injected the needle. As the antidote trickled in, Nancy glanced at the man and said, "If you haven't the courage to share the responsibility, I'll take it all."

Then she gave her attention wholly to her task. When all the morphine had gone in, she withdrew the needle and pressed a bit of alcohol-soaked cotton to the pricked flesh. Then she sat down on the side of the bed to watch, her hand on the woman's feeble pulse. Gradually she could feel a stronger flicker of life beneath her finger. The breathing, which had been almost suspended, became more regular. Nancy lifted the lids to find the eyes still

rolled back. Maybe she hadn't given enough of the morphine. Suppose Mrs. Farrell didn't come out of it? Would she be blamed for going ahead and giving treatment without waiting for a doctor's orders?

Then gradually the pulse picked up perceptibly, the breathing became stronger. Mr. Barnes hadn't spoken a word since he washed his hands of the affair, but now he stepped closer to the bed and exclaimed hopefully, "Her color's coming back!"

"She's coming out of it," Nancy said.

"Thank the lord you were here!" said Mr. Barnes. In his great relief, he seemed to have entirely forgotten the obstacles he had tried to put in her way.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The proprietor left the room when he was convinced that Mrs. Farrell would live. When he had gone, Nancy sent Sally down the hall to tell Mrs. Marshall that the sick woman was better.

"But don't give her any hint of what really happened," she warned.

It was nearly an hour later before the doctor arrived. When Mr. Barnes brought him up, Dr. Hudson had already been given a sketchy account of what had happened.

Nancy drew the genial country doctor aside and explained what she had done.

"Exactly what I would have done had I been here," he assured her. "Of course a stomach pump would have been best, if you had had one, but you got results anyhow."

While he examined the patient, she opened her eyes and looked at him resentfully. The doctor glanced up at the proprietor. "Please phone for an ambulance," he said.

"Don't want to go to hospital," mumbled Mrs. Farrell.

The doctor left the bedside and joined Mr. Barnes near a window, saying, in a low tone, "Her people must be notified. Somebody will have to be with her constantly, or she may try it again."

"I don't know a thing about her family," stated Mr. Barnes. "Dr. Barrow, from Summerton, is her doctor. He'll be back here this afternoon."

"She certainly has this young nurse to thank for being alive now."

"I'm sure I'll get no thanks," said Nancy ruefully. "But at least I did what I thought I should."

When the ambulance had carried Mrs. Farrell down the steep road to the hospital at Asheville, Nancy faced the unpleasant task of softening the story for her patient. Though she had warned Sally not to tell what had happened, she suddenly remembered now that the excited girl had blurted out the fact of the attempted suicide when she had first run into the room.

Mrs. Marshall was sitting before the table that had been set for them, but she had scarcely tasted her food. Nancy got a shock at the strained expression on her face, and her pallor. She made no pretense of eating herself until she had told briefly of her experience.

"Surely this terrible experience will impress the poor woman with the awful consequences of such a deed," Mrs. Marshall said. "I do hope and pray she'll never try such a thing again. And what a blessing you were here."

"I certainly hope she won't try it again," said Nancy, pouring herself a cup of strong coffee. Her hand was a little unsteady.

When the coffee had braced her a bit, she managed to eat something, but Mrs. Marshall had lost her appetite entirely. When the table had been cleared, and Mrs. Marshall settled for her afternoon

nap, Nancy went into her own room. She read a while, hoping to get her mind off the unpleasant experience, then she fell asleep. She roused with a start a little after four, when Ellen came in.

"Sorry I woke you, Nan," her sister said.

Ellen's eyes were bright, her cheeks flushed from the exercise in the bracing mountain air.

"I don't have to ask if you had a good time," said Nan, lifting her head from the pillow. "It's advertised all over your face."

Ellen sat down on the side of Nancy's bed and said enthusiastically, "It's been a heavenly day. Such a wonderful view up high, overlooking range after range of mountains. And they were all such fun, especially Bert! He couldn't have been nicer. Isn't he simply super?"

"He's quite a guy, but don't let yourself get too interested in him. There are scores of girls he can pick from."

"Too late. I'm already madly in love!"

"Now, Ellen, don't be ridiculous! You scarcely know him."

"I know him well enough to be sure he's a man made to order just for me—money, charm, good looks . . . everything!"

Nancy laughed. "I thought it was Terry you were crazy about when he was down home."

"Oh, Terry! I'm afraid he runs too deep for me. Why the rude creature didn't even answer my letter."

"You wrote to him?" exclaimed Nancy, shocked. "What on earth did you write him?"

"Just a note to give him an address I promised. He could at least have acknowledged it."

"He's a notoriously poor correspondent, if that's any comfort," Nancy said, trying to hide how annoyed she felt.

"Well, I'm going to shower and change," said Ellen, beginning to peel off her riding habit. "These

togs are smart all right, but I need something more feminine to help turn on the real appeal."

Nancy laughed, thinking of the plaid shirts and blue jeans Ellen had worn constantly at home.

She lay back on the bed when Ellen went into the bathroom, dismissing the thought of telling Ellen about her harrowing experience. There was no point in dampening her sister's blithe spirits.

When Ellen returned to the room, she said, "Crawl out and doll up, too. There's going to be a dance orchestra downstairs tonight. Bert said you must come, too, and have dinner with the rest of us in the Crystal Room."

"It sounds inviting," said Nancy, sitting up. "And I could do with a little diversion."

It was good to get away from the depressing atmosphere of the south wing into the exotic setting of the Crystal Room. Nancy and Ellen stopped by to pick up Carol and Sue. The four girls, in their ankle-length dresses, made a charming picture as they went down to the lobby to meet Bert and Dr. Barrow.

Bert had two other young men with him, whom he introduced to the girls as Don Moore and Henry Walters. He had invited them to join the dinner party.

When Nancy had acknowledged the introductions, she glanced at the doctor's face. He looked very much preoccupied. He worked his way to her side and, placing a hand on her arm, led her aside.

"Have you seen her already?" she asked.

"Yes. Barnes told me about it as soon as I got in. I borrowed Bert's car and went down to the hospital."

"Was she all right?"

"As well as I expected, after all that," he told her.

"It was horrible," said Nancy.

"A very trying experience for you, my dear."

"She made the remark to Mrs. Marshall and me

one day that she'd rather check out than face a lingering death from cancer."

"So that was it!" he exclaimed. "She kept asking me questions about her operation this morning."

"Then it *is* cancer?" asked Nancy.

"Lord, yes! I told her she'd have to go back to the hospital for more X-ray treatments. She probably knows enough about the treatment for cancer to know she has it—and of course she's heard her sister talk of it a great deal."

"Her sister? Is she a doctor or something?"

"Alice Phillips. Didn't you know?"

This information sent a shock through Nancy. "Heavens, no!" she said. "She's never mentioned any of her family—"

Now that the first shock was over, she thought how awful it would have been had she not done the right thing to revive the woman. She wondered if she would have had the courage to go ahead and do what she had done if she had known Mrs. Farrell was a sister of the nurse who had so abruptly dismissed her from Downer.

What a blessing I didn't know! she thought to herself.

"Try to forget it for the time being, Nan. Come along—Bert's ready for us to go to the dining room."

Nancy sat between the doctor and Don Moore. She learned that it was Don's birthday, which had been Bert's inspiration for the party. The two friends had trekked all over Europe together, and they amused the guests with tales of their adventures—some of them obviously embroidered, for additional laughs.

Carol sat on the other side of the doctor and almost monopolized his attention. Nancy was beginning to think she was making good her remark of several weeks ago, that she would like to make a try for the doctor herself. She was in one of her most scintillating moods tonight.

Ellen, sitting between Bert and Henry Walters,

showed her preference all too plainly. But it didn't matter. Henry seemed interested in the quiet Sue, who looked lovely in a soft blue, which did much for her rather plain face. Sue was the salt of the earth and Nancy's heart warmed toward her, as she sat appraising the group.

Later they danced, and Nancy found herself relaxing in the congenial atmosphere and music and laughter. Once when she paused a moment with Bert to look out from an arched balcony onto the moon-flooded valley, she thought how perfect this would be if it were only Terry beside her. But Terry seemed worlds away—and wherever he was, Nancy was certain he was not thinking of her.

Bert didn't leave her to her thoughts but a moment, however. "I still can't get over my disappointment that you didn't go with us this morning," he said softly.

"It's a blessing I didn't," she told him, her matter-of-fact tone ignoring the softness in his voice. "I suppose Dr. Barrow hasn't had time to tell you what happened to his other patient here while you were away?"

"No, he didn't. He borrowed my car to go down to the hospital—but he didn't say why."

"Mrs. Farrell took strychnine. The maid called me. I gave her morphine as an antidote, and brought her back to consciousness, and then when Dr. Hudson came, he sent her down to the hospital in Asheville."

"And you were going through all that while we were away having a good time."

"Well, what are nurses for, if they can't be on hand for such emergencies?" she asked gayly.

"Brave little nurse!" he exclaimed, lifting her hand and pressing the back of it to his lips. "It makes me feel good to know there's such a competent person looking after Dearest."

"You're a sweet boy, and a great comfort to her, I'm sure," said Nancy, determined that his sentiment

should not get too serious. "There comes Ellen," she added. "She thinks I've run off with you."

"Oh, Ellen—cute kid! At least she's had a thoroughly good time today . . . I really should ask her for this next dance."

And off he went. Nancy stood there a moment alone, wondering what was the matter with her. Bert was a charming person, with everything a woman could want—and yet she couldn't make herself warm to his advances. Was she going on forever dreaming of a man who scarcely knew she existed, letting excellent chances for marriage slip past her?

On Sunday morning Nancy was shocked when she went into Mrs. Marshall's room to find her looking so weary and depleted. Yesterday's experience had been more of a strain than Nancy would have believed possible. It seemed obvious that Mrs. Marshall had received a shock that wouldn't be easy to overcome.

She hurried back to her room to phone Dr. Barrow, and five minutes later he was at Mrs. Marshall's door.

He looked serious when he checked his patient's heart and blood pressure.

"I think I'd better go home," the usually cheerful Mrs. Marshall told him in a faint voice.

"Wouldn't be a bad idea," the doctor admitted. "It may be a bit high for you here. And you had too much excitement yesterday."

"It was a bit of a shock, knowing the awful suffering a person like that must go through."

Nancy noticed a faintly skeptical smile on the doctor's lips, but he said nothing.

"I wish I could have a long talk with her," Mrs. Marshall added, "but I don't feel up to it this morning."

"You certainly are not able to do any such thing!"

the doctor said emphatically. "No use wasting your precious vitality!"

When he rose to go, he gave Nancy a significant glance and she followed him out the door. "I wouldn't have believed anyone could go downhill that fast in twenty-four hours," he said. "I'm going to get an ambulance to take her straight to Downer Hospital. Have her ready to leave as soon as the ambulance comes. I guess you'd better ride back with her . . ."

By five that afternoon the ambulance was backing up to the rear entrance of Downer Hospital. Nancy had a sinking feeling when the institution she had always loved came into view. Then she remembered that Terry was here, not far from where she would be looking after Mrs. Marshall.

She tried to make her patient comfortable in a quiet room at the end of the women's floor. She had just given her an alcohol rub and settled her between the cool sheets when Dr. Barrow arrived. He and Bert had come in an hour earlier.

Bert was pacing restlessly up and down the corridor when Nancy and Dr. Barrow finally went out. "How did she stand the trip?" he asked anxiously.

"She's naturally exhausted. But I hope a good night's sleep will start her uphill again," said the doctor. "We'll have to have three nursing shifts. Nancy can't do it all here."

"Of course not!" agreed Bert. "Don't spare expenses, Doc, for anything that may help. Nancy's been wonderful to handle it all till now."

"You look all in, my dear," said the doctor. "I've already sent for another nurse. As soon as she comes on duty, you'd better get some sleep."

And so when Carol and Sue got back from their mountain week end, they found Nancy already asleep in her old bed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Nancy had not been at the hospital long when she learned that Miss Phillips had gone to Asheville to see about her sister. Two days later she came face to face with her in the hall. Expecting to receive a curt nod from her superior as usual, Nancy was prepared to hurry on when Miss Phillips came straight to her and said, "Miss Craig, I want you to know how deeply I appreciate what you did for my sister."

"I only did my duty," Nancy replied. "I'm so sorry it happened. How is she?"

"She was temporarily out of her mind with worry, I'm sure. She had guessed from the treatment Dr. Barrow was giving her that she has cancer."

"Yes, I know."

"But the doctor thinks there's a chance of her recovery. I tried to make her face the facts when I was there. She has to have the will to live. She would be dead now—but for you. I do want you to know how grateful I am for all you did."

Nancy could only guess at how much courage it took for this proud, aloof woman to say so much, after what had happened between them.

"Your saying this means more than you'll ever guess, Miss Phillips," she said softly.

She felt a tightness in her throat as she moved on toward her patient's room. If only the supervisor had apologized for dismissing her so abruptly, Nancy would have felt vindicated. But she knew this straight-laced woman would never offer such an apology as long as she believed a nurse had made a mistake.

She was too much worried over Mrs. Marshall to

dwell long on personal affairs. A cardiogram had revealed a thrombosis. Though she knew her patient might recover and linger on for years, there was also the possibility that she would slip away any day. She told Mrs. Marshall about her meeting with Miss Phillips, and the news she had brought of her sister.

"Nancy, I'm so happy you were able to bring her back, and give her time to realize the mistake she would have made. As I can't talk with her myself, I want to send her something to read on that subject. I'll get Bert to bring some books from the house, and maybe you'll mail them for me."

"I'll be glad to," agreed Nancy. She didn't disturb her patient by saying that people who attempted suicide once were likely to make the effort again at the first opportunity.

She rolled Mrs. Marshall's bed higher at the head, preparatory to giving her her breakfast.

"It's so wonderful to feel ready to go," said the sick woman. "In fact, I have so much curiosity about the other side I'm looking forward to it."

"How you talk!" exclaimed Nancy, trying to dismiss the gloomy subject with banter. "Now be good and eat your breakfast, or you'll die of starvation."

"Really I'm not being morbid about it. It seems rather nice to be through with a worn-out body. The only thing that worries me now is Bert."

"Bert?" Nancy repeated, as she poured a cup of steaming Sanka for her patient.

"If he were only married—had someone to anchor to after I'm gone—I could go in peace."

"He'll miss you terribly—but that's a long time off yet."

"He's very fond of you. I could die happy if my boy were married to a levelheaded girl like you, Nancy."

"Oh, Bert's just nice to me because he's nice to everybody," put in Nancy. "I'm sure there are other

girls he's more fond of, who will fit in better with his carefree life."

"But that's just it. He's drifted long enough. I could almost wish we'd had no money when he was growing up. Then he might have made something useful of himself. He has ability, I'm sure, but so far it hasn't been directed into any useful channel. Look at Terry Fenton! His struggle has really made him. Though at the time his family lost their money, I thought it was a terrible tragedy. I worried a lot about it."

Nancy suddenly realized how many times Mrs. Marshall had asked her questions about Terry and his work. However, this was the first time she had compared him with her grandson.

Mrs. Marshall's words had been flowing on while Nancy's thoughts drifted. Now she caught the words, "I'd like to think the money I'm leaving him will be used for service to humanity."

"There are many places it could be used," said Nancy, anxious to switch her patient's thoughts from herself.

Later in the day she thought again of what Mrs. Marshall's money might do when she saw Martha Williams cleaning the chart room. Martha had been off duty with the flu. This was the first time Nancy had seen her since returning to Downer.

"How's Tommy?" she asked.

"Just 'bout the same, I reckon," replied Martha.

"Is he still here?"

"No'm. They had so many cases of polio they had to send home those that was some better—and we couldn't pay, nohow."

"Are you keeping up the massage?"

"I can't git to it every day," Martha admitted. "After I do my eight hours here, I have to go home to cook, clean house, wash the young ones' clothes. There just ain't enough hours to do all I got to do."

"I know it's hard," Nancy admitted. "The massage should really be given by someone who knows just

how it should be done. I'll go over and see him myself this afternoon, and maybe I can make some suggestions."

"Since I had to take him home," explained Martha, "I had to hire a colored girl to look after him and the other young ones."

That afternoon Nancy borrowed Carol's car and found the three-room house on the mean little street in Splinterville, as the section was called.

She carried a storybook for Tommy, blocks and a ball for the younger children. Tommy was delighted, for he hadn't forgotten her.

"Sure I know you," he said proudly. "You're the Christmas lady!"

Nancy laughed and gave his brown head a caressing touch with her hand. In the presence of children who needed her, she always had a glowing sense of being in the right place.

"We're going to get those legs of yours so you can use the skates you got for Christmas," she told him. "Wouldn't you like that?"

"You bet!" exclaimed Tommy. "I'm all right now, but my legs won't mind me."

"We'll soon make them mind," Nancy promised. "Now let Nancy see what she can do with them."

She pulled aside the covers of the shabby little bed to expose the wasted and useless limbs. Then she slowly began testing them out, tentatively manipulating them, alert for the tender places.

"Does Mother do it like this?" she asked.

"Sometimes she tries to make 'em work, but they won't," Tommy told her in a discouraged voice.

As Nancy suspected, Tommy would probably make little progress with Martha's fitful help. From then on, she went every other day to work with the child, after she left Mrs. Marshall. It seemed hopeless at first, then one day he could move his right big toe. It was a tremendous stimulant to further effort, boosting Tommy's hopes skyward.

"Dr. Fenton will be proud of me," said Tommy happily.

"So you like Dr. Fenton?" she asked.

"He's the best doctor in all the world, even if he didn't make my legs work."

"But they will some day, if you keep trying."

Martha had told Nancy that the doctor came by about once a week to see the child, but she had never met him there. Today, however, she had come later than usual, for she had had to come on the bus. She was still massaging and manipulating Tommy's limbs when she heard someone in the hall. Thinking it was the nurse, bringing the younger children in from the yard, she did not look up.

Then Tommy's joyous cry shocked her into a realization of who it was, as he exclaimed, "Oh, hello, Doc!"

She glanced up straight into Terry's eyes and her heart turned turtle.

"Good for you, Nancy! They told me you were helping. That's just what Tommy needs."

Nancy didn't have a chance to reply before Tommy asked, "What you got in that bag? Did you bring me something?"

Nancy had already seen a storybook and some puzzles Terry had given the child. No wonder he had no money for expensive dating, if he treated all his home patients as generously. He now drew from his bag a small rubber ball with a long rubber cord stretching from it.

"See, this cord loops over your wrist," Terry demonstrated. "You hold the ball like this, then throw it and it comes right back to you."

Tommy chuckled from sheer delight. He had a dimple at the right corner of his mouth and when he smiled it made him look like a cherub.

"Let me!" he demanded. "I bet I can do it, too."

"Of course you can—easy as pie," Terry assured him.

Tommy tried several times, and each time the

ball came bounding back to him his happy laughter filled the room. Finally Nancy caught the ball on the rebound and said, "How about showing the doctor what your toes can do?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Tommy, his big brown eyes growing rounder as he looked up at Terry to say, "They moved—my toe moved!"

"No! I don't believe it!"

"I bet you a dollar!" Then Tommy settled back on his pillows and, with a visible effort, finally moved his big toe.

"Nancy, you're a genius!" exclaimed Terry. "When Martha told me you were coming out regularly, I knew there was more hope for Tommy. I felt terrible about having to send him home, but there were so many new cases. It's started early this season. We're crowded and overworked."

"I suppose there'd be no hope of getting on pediatrics without Miss Phillips' sanction." Nancy's remark was half a question, half a statement. She no longer had any illusions that Terry was ignorant of the circumstances under which she had left the hospital before going home. Those tales traveled too fast by the grapevine of gossip in an institution like Downer.

"I thought you were fully occupied with one of Dr. Barrow's patients," he said.

"I am, at present, but she could get someone else, if I got a chance on pediatrics."

"It's where you ought to be," he said with an unexpected warmth. "You have a way with children that's nothing short of magic."

She wondered afterward what more he might have said if Martha hadn't come in from her work just then. "Both of you here," she said in surprise. "I sho' thank y'all for tryin' to he'p my boy."

"Mama, what you bet I can't move my toes?" exclaimed Tommy. "And look't my ball Doctor brung me."

"Can he really move his toes?" asked the colorless woman, excited for once.

"Show her, Tommy," said Nancy.

When Martha saw this evidence of progress, tears filled her eyes and she said humbly, "Miss Nancy, you've been too good. I don't deserve for you to be so good to me."

"Of course you do," Terry assured her.

Nancy had been puzzled by the woman's attitude ever since she had been working with the child. Martha seemed to think it was too much for anyone to do, asserting that she didn't merit so much kindness. Nancy tried to dismiss it all with the thought that Martha's poverty and lowly position had given her a bad inferiority complex.

She pulled the sheet back over the boy's legs, handed him his ball, and settled him comfortably on the pillows.

"Nancy has to run along now," she said, "but she'll see you again day after tomorrow."

"How did you come?" Terry asked, as she turned toward the door. "I didn't notice any car out in front."

"On the bus. I often use Carol's car, but she was going out this afternoon."

"Oh, then I can take you home," he said eagerly. "Still at the apartment with Sue and Carol?"

"Yes, but I hate to take you out of your way," replied Nancy, her tone chilling a little. She didn't want him to think that she was lapping up the crumbs of his attention too eagerly.

"Don't be silly!" he exclaimed, when they were on the sidewalk. "Do you begrudge me the pleasure of seeing you home?"

"Now, who's being silly?" she exclaimed, flaring. "I didn't think you even knew I was back in Summerton—"

He helped her into the car, then went around and slipped under the wheel before he said, "I thought

you were too preoccupied with your other admirers to have time to bother with me."

"What other admirers?" exclaimed Nancy in a high-pitched voice, above the vigorous starting of the car.

"The perennial Dr. Barrow, and now I understand Bert Marshall is greatly in favor."

"That playboy! He never has a serious thought. Really," she exclaimed, beginning to feel angry, "the way you carry on, anyone would think you're interested in my affairs, and of course *that's* impossible!"

"Now who's being utterly absurd?"

She didn't know just how to take that. She was seething too much inside to trust herself to speak for a couple of blocks, and he was too stubborn to reply. It had been a mistake to accept the ride home. It was only making matters more involved.

"I ought to get a car of my own," she said, after a time. "Then I wouldn't have to worry other people riding in theirs."

"Then why don't you get one?" he asked in a tone as remote as the stars.

"I felt like I ought to hang on to my money after Dad's heart attack. Maybe they'll need it at home when Ellen goes away to college."

"How is your father?" asked Terry, his tone almost normal again.

"Better, thanks be! Ellen came up and spent a few days with me in the mountains. She said Dad's getting around a bit in his room. The doctor's even letting him paste a few stamps in his albums."

"I have some stamps I can send him," Terry said eagerly. "I started collecting them some time back, but I've about given up hope of ever having time to assemble them. I may as well let somebody have them who can enjoy them."

"I know he'll appreciate them, Terry," said Nancy, feeling almost happy.

And so they returned at least to civil friendliness by the time Nancy reached the apartment. As he was seeing her to the door, she wanted to say something more about the work on his ward, but she couldn't bear to seem like pushing herself into his domain. If he really needed and wanted her, why couldn't he pull some wires to get her there?

She felt rather sick at heart when she went inside to find notes from both of the girls saying they had gone out for dinner dates. Why couldn't she and Terry get back to the free and easy comradeship that had brightened their friendship in the beginning? She was so upset and irritated that when Bert phoned and wanted to take her to a show, she pleaded a headache. If she hadn't had so many dates with him since returning to Summerton the rumors of their friendship would never have reached Terry's ears, to add more fuel to his jealousy.

"Jealousy!" she repeated aloud. Why a person couldn't be jealous unless he really cared, she thought with a great lifting of her spirits. Though this was doubtful consolation, it helped Nancy's morale as she opened some cans for her lonely supper.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Although Mrs. Marshall had not been able to sit up for a long time, she was interested in all that went on about her. She asked almost daily what news Nancy had from her father and family, and she inquired of Miss Phillips about her sister.

"She does seem in better spirits," the Supervisor of Nurses replied one morning to her inquiry. "I talked with her nurse over the phone yesterday. She reported that Helen seemed more cheerful. She wanted me to thank you for the books you sent."

Mrs. Marshall knew all about Tommy's affliction, through Nancy and his mother. When Martha wanted to cheer anyone up, she had a dry sense of humor. She often amused the sick woman with funny things her children said and did, as she mopped and dusted the room.

The morning Nancy told Mrs. Marshall about Tommy moving his toes, a smile came over her pale face. "That must make you very happy," she said.

"It really was a thrill! Children are always so responsive and appreciative."

"Wouldn't some braces help?" asked Mrs. Marshall, her eyes bright with interest.

"When he gets a little further along, I expect we can get them for him through the polio fund."

"Nancy, I'd love to give them to him!"

Nancy felt embarrassed. She didn't want her patient to think she had been talking up this case in the hope of getting help.

"Oh, but you don't have to— That's what the March of Dimes is for—to take care of children like Tommy."

"Maybe I'm selfish in wanting to do this myself," persisted Mrs. Marshall. "I won't be here for another March of Dimes."

"Well . . ." conceded Nancy. "I'd be the last to deny you the pleasure. I suppose you know these braces are terribly expensive. Tommy will have to have them for both legs for a time, though the right one now seems more hopeful than the left."

"That's all right. I'll get Bert to give you a check next time he comes."

"If Tommy could have only stayed in the pediatric ward, where he could have daily massage and care, his progress would be faster. But they're so crowded. Terry—I mean, Dr. Fenton said the ones who were out of danger had to be sent home to make room for those whose lives had to be saved. There are so many cases already."

Her patient's eyes seemed unusually bright, and

even a faint tinge of color had come to her lips. "How does Terry Fenton stand in the profession?" she asked. Nancy had answered that question before, but her patient's memory had failed greatly. She certainly had asked many questions about him, and Nancy wondered if Mrs. Marshall suspected how much she loved him.

"He's considered one of the most promising of the younger doctors. This is his first year as resident physician. Last year he interned in a very fine pediatric hospital in the Middlewest."

"You seem to know a good deal about him."

"I've known him since my student days. He knew from the beginning what his speciality would be, and he's shooting straight to the mark."

"If only my Bert had some driving purpose in his life—as that young man has. He's had a terrible financial struggle—Terry, I mean. But I've found it to be true that a person becomes stronger for having to battle his way through life."

"Terry's had a struggle, all right."

"I knew his parents very well. His mother made her debut about the time my daughter-in-law did. Terry Fenton comes of fine stock."

Mrs. Marshall seemed quiet and thoughtful the rest of the day. Just before Nancy left at three she called her to her bedside and said, "I've decided I'm going to make some changes in my will. Please phone my lawyer for me, and have him come here tomorrow morning to discuss these changes with me."

Nancy felt a little uncomfortable about this, recalling their conversation of the morning. Did she intend to cut Bert out of part of his inheritance in hopes that greater struggle would make a man of him?

In the brief second that she hesitated, Mrs. Marshall seemed to read her thoughts. "You're wondering why I don't get Bert to phone him, but I'd rather he not know this until it's done; then I'll tell him."

"Of course I'll do anything you wish," Nancy hastened to say.

"And if you'll find out what the braces for Tommy will cost, we'll give you a check."

Nancy felt a surge of joy that this would give her an excuse to see Terry. She had felt very discouraged at their senseless bickering over nothing the last time they were together. As soon as the three o'clock nurse came on duty, she hurried along the quarter of a mile of corridors to the pediatric ward. She found Terry in the chart room, poring over some reports. She paused in the doorway, and when he seemed unaware of her presence, she said, "Sorry to interrupt, Terry."

There was no mistaking the eagerness that leaped into his eyes at seeing her. He got quickly to his feet. "Nan! What a nice surprise! Come in."

She told him what she had come for, and he led her to his office, where he found the catalogue of braces. As they bent over the book, trying to decide on the best thing for Tommy, his shoulder pressed against hers, and she didn't shift her position. Suddenly he stopped speaking, and for a moment they stood there side by side.

Nan thought, If I could only find something to say to bridge the chasm created by our recent misunderstandings . . .

Terry was the first to break the silence. "I think this will be fine for Tommy," he said.

Perhaps he hadn't been feeling what she felt at all, she thought half angrily. She read the description of the braces, and Terry wrote down the amount they would be for her to give Mrs. Marshall.

"It's certainly generous of her to do this," he said. "She's a great lady, anyway. My mother used to be a good friend of her daughter-in-law. But of course the Marshalls kept their money and we didn't."

In a flash Nancy thought she had a key to Terry's supersensitiveness. His lack of money, against the background of his family's former affluence, had left

him with a distressing inferiority complex. She could see how this could easily be transferred to his love life, causing him to think that a girl would prefer a man with money to him.

She spoke emphatically. "How fortunate you are! It's made a man of you, while Bert Marshall still has no more maturity than a ten-year-old boy."

"You surprise me!" exclaimed Terry. "From all reports, I would have thought he was your ideal man. You're with him practically every night—or so I hear."

"Why should I miss a good dinner or a show, to sit home waiting for the telephone to ring?"

She turned abruptly and hurried toward the door. Just as she was about to dart out in the hall, Terry said, "Oh, Nancy, when the braces come, I'll go over to Tommy's with you to help fit them on."

There was, surprisingly, a rather happy expression on his face, and a lilt in his voice, but it had come too late to quiet Nancy's seething emotions.

"Thanks," she said. "That's very kind of you."

Less than a week after Mrs. Marshall gave Nancy the check for Tommy's braces, she took a sudden turn for the worse. Nancy had stayed on after hours because she had called Dr. Barrow, only to find him out on a call.

"I can't go home," she told Mrs. Carter, the nurse who came in to take her place at three o'clock, "until I know what Dr. Barrow thinks of her condition."

"She has practically no pulse now," said Mrs. Carter uneasily.

Though Mrs. Marshall's consciousness seemed to fade out at times, Nancy didn't want to alarm her by letting her know she was staying on, so she sat out of sight near the door. It was almost four before the doctor came. He didn't try to hide his concern when he had examined the sick woman. He drew Nancy outside.

"It's only a matter of hours," he said. "You'd better let Bert know."

Tears blinded Nancy's eyes, and she said brokenly, "I shouldn't feel so terrible at her going. I really think she's looking forward to it. I've learned to love her more than any patient I ever had."

"She's a saint! I'm glad you've had an opportunity to be associated with her."

"I have you to thank for that."

"You ought to know by this time, Nan, that nothing gives me more pleasure than to be able to do something for you."

She was relieved when a nurse came along the hall.

When she phoned the Marshall home, the housekeeper told her that Bert had gone to the Country Club for a round of golf. She called the club and had him paged. She wondered, as she left the phone, if Bert had been told about the changes in his grandmother's will, which had been rewritten by Alfred Sawyer, Mrs. Marshall's lawyer, several days ago. Bert generally came to visit in the morning, when Nancy was there, but occasionally she had heard of his coming in the late afternoon or evening, so she had no way of knowing what had passed between them. However, she hadn't noticed any difference in Bert's affectionate attitude toward his grandmother. Evidently if he knew, the change had not been too upsetting.

Nancy sat just inside the room, consulting occasionally with the nurse on duty, and keeping an alert ear for Bert's approach. At last she heard him and tiptoed out of the room. He was walking quickly, his face anxious.

"She's worse?" he asked. "I thought she seemed about the same when I was here last night."

Nancy decided to tell him the truth. "Dr. Barrow says it's only a matter of a few hours."

"Oh, Nancy!" he exclaimed.

She slipped her hand consolingly into his, and said

softly, "Don't grieve. She's looking forward to being rid of her worn-out body. She feels she's going on doing over there the things she was interested in here. But of course I know how you feel. I love her, too, as if she were my own grandmother."

"She loves *you*, Nancy. It's been a great comfort to me having you look after her."

She led him into the room, and they stood for a moment looking down on the waxy-white face. Nancy's heart always ached for a man at a time like this. There was so little that they could do to help, and their emotions were generally so inhibited by a fear of seeming weak that she knew they must suffer even more than a woman. She could see the little jaw muscle working spasmodically near Bert's ear. His hands were gripped so tightly that the knuckles were white.

The dying woman didn't rouse, and after a time Bert went over and sat down in the armchair, his head buried in his hands. Nancy returned to her chair by the door.

It seemed an eternity, though it was probably not more than an hour, when Nancy noticed Mrs. Marshall moving. Then she murmured, "Bert—Nancy!"

Nancy tipped across the room, and Mrs. Carter said in passing, "I'll call Dr. Barrow. He wanted me to let him know if she roused—said he'd be in his office."

Bert was at his grandmother's side before Nancy. He took the bony, blue-veined hand in his and caressed it.

"I told you about changing my will, didn't I, Bert?" the old lady asked.

"Yes, Dearest, and that's fine! The money will do a world of good where you've placed it—and you've left me more than I deserve."

A faint smile softened the white lips. "It won't be long now. You mustn't grieve, Bert. I'll be happy."

Tears were streaming down Nancy's cheeks as she watched him fight for control. Then she heard Dr.

Barrow crossing the room. Mrs. Marshall evidently realized his presence, for she opened her eyes again and said, "Thanks, Doctor, for your help and faithfulness."

She seemed to drift away while his firm fingers pressed her pulse. When he removed his hand, he glanced at Nancy and shook his head. But the patient came back abruptly, an almost startled expression on her face.

"Bert! Nancy!" she said, almost in a whisper.

"I'm here, darling," said Nancy, taking the hand Bert wasn't holding.

Then the dying woman turned her eyes toward her grandson and said, "I could go away completely happy, if I—I thought you had someone like capable Nancy to look after you." With an effort, she brought their hands together.

"If I could only think I'm good enough for Nancy," Bert murmured.

"She'll make you good enough."

With this her eyes closed again. They stood there watching silently. Nancy felt the hand relax in hers. Then, hearing a deep sigh, she knew it was all over. For a moment no one spoke or stirred. If Nancy had lost one of her own family, she could not have felt more bereft. Suddenly she found herself in Bert's arms, weeping her heart out.

A half hour later Nancy was alone in the room, packing Mrs. Marshall's clothes in a suitcase, when Dr. Barrow came to the door and said, "Before you you leave, Nan, please stop by my office."

"All right, Doctor."

She wished she could have left without this. She couldn't forget the strained expression on his face when she glanced at him after Mrs. Marshall had expressed her wish about Bert and herself. So she was not surprised a few minutes later, as she went into Dr. Barrow's office, to hear him say, "Congratulations, Nan. I didn't know things had gone so far between you and Bert."

"They haven't!" she said sharply. Why were her feelings always being misinterpreted by one man about another? "That was only Mrs. Marshall's wishful thinking. Bert only took me in his arms because of our mutual sorrow."

"Oh, I see," he murmured, but his expression brightened perceptibly.

"I'm fond of Bert, but I don't love him—that way. I mean, I love someone else," she blurted out, hoping to clear herself entirely.

To her amazement, he misinterpreted that too. His face brightened still more as he exclaimed, "Nan, how happy you make me! I've been realizing for some time how much you've come to mean to me. But I hesitated to speak because of the difference in our ages—I thought it might not be fair to you. But I do think I could make you happy."

"Oh, Dr. Barrow, I didn't mean— Oh, Doctor, I'm so upset I can't think of myself right now. Couldn't we talk of this another time?"

The minute she put it that way she knew she was a coward for evading the issue, leaving him any shred of hope.

"Of course, my dear. I should have had better judgment than to bring it up now. But what happened in there gave me such a shock. You run along now and get some rest."

In a daze of misery and dejection, Nancy left the office and the hospital, and walked slowly back to the apartment.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The day after Mrs. Marshall's funeral Tommy's braces arrived. Terry phoned Nancy that evening, asking if

she could go over to Martha's home late the next afternoon to help with the braces.

"Of course, I'll be glad to go," she said eagerly, welcoming any chance to escape from the dark mood that had enveloped her since Mrs. Marshall's death.

Terry came for her promptly at six the next afternoon. The days were at their longest now, and the sun still beamed warmly on the dusty streets. At the bus stop nearest the hospital they came upon Martha, waiting for her bus.

"There's Mrs. Williams now. I'll pick her up," said Terry.

Nancy felt a selfish moment of disappointment, then realized it might be good to have someone else along, as it would save her from having to steer their conversation around sensitive topics. She wondered what was wrong, anyway, that so many things she said and did were misinterpreted. Dr. Barrow thought she loved him instead of Terry, while Terry seemed to think she cared for almost any man who came along, except himself.

When he stopped the car at the curb where Martha waited, the woman's dull face brightened.

"Come on and ride, Martha," Nancy called. "We're going out to your house now to take Tommy's braces."

"Oh, Miss Nancy, y'all are too good to me."

Nancy slipped over to the middle of the seat, as Martha got in. The shy woman sat close against the door, so as not to crowd the others.

"I don't deserve for you to be so good to me, Miss Nancy," repeated Martha, apparently determined to force her unworthiness upon them.

"It's not just me! We couldn't do this right without Dr. Fenton," said Nancy.

"I know. He's sure been good, too, but it was you got the money from Miz Marshall, and been coming out for weeks till Tommy can move his right foot—and almost stand on it."

"He'll progress more rapidly now, Mrs. Williams, when he has the braces," Terry promised her.

Tommy was more excited over the braces than over all the toys they had brought him. The smaller children were eager and curious, too. Martha had to keep pushing them away so that the doctor and the nurse wouldn't be handicapped.

At last the braces were adjusted and in place. But weighty and cumbersome as they were, they were soon to give the boy a new sense of freedom. They lifted him to a standing position. Then, moving his legs with their hands, they steered him across the room, just to give him the hope of walking eventually. After some effort they succeeded in getting him to move the right leg a bit. But they had to be careful of overexertion. Then they showed Martha how to manipulate the braces so that he could sit down.

By this time Martha had sent the younger children scurrying into the yard. When Nancy glanced at her in triumph over Tommy's progress, tears were streaming down the woman's cheeks.

"All this you've done for me, Miss Nancy, when I ain't fitten to tie your shoelaces," Martha said in a new wave of self-deprecation.

Nancy lost her patience. "Now look here, Martha," she said, "I've had enough of this! You haven't done anything to me, so why keep on talking like this?"

"Oh, yes, I have! I can't sleep with my bad conscience another night without telling you about it."

"What in the world do you mean?"

"I mean it was my fault that time Miss Phillips fired you for giving the wrong medicine."

"But, Martha, it couldn't have been! I thought it was—"

"It was all my fault, I tell you. When I was cleaning in the chart room and you turned around to say something to Miss Carol, I accidentally knocked some of the name cards off the tray. I must've put 'em back in the wrong places, but heaven knows I didn't

mean to make the mistake. Both of 'em had pills that looked just about alike. I thought they was the same, anyhow."

"Oh, Martha, if I'd only known at the time—"

"I know—I should've said so as soon as the woman got sick, but I knew I'd lose my job. Tommy'd just been brought to the hospital, and I was nearly crazy."

"I know, Martha," said Nancy, gently now. "It put you in a terrible spot. But all these months I've thought it was somebody else's fault. I knew I hadn't made a mistake, though Miss Phillips still thinks I did."

Suddenly Nancy realized that Terry was looking at her as if a great light had just broken in on his darkness. "Hearing this," he said unexpectedly, "makes many things more understandable."

Before Nancy could question him about his remark, Martha said, "What in the world will become of my children if I lose my job?"

"If you lose your job, Martha, be sure to let me know," said Terry. "I'm sure I can get you another just as good, if not better." Then he turned to Nancy and said, "I'll have to hurry. A polio patient was due in soon after I left. New ones are coming in every day now."

Before they left, they showed Martha how to take the braces off, and Nancy promised to come back the following afternoon. She rather dreaded the trip home, fearing that Terry would question her further about Martha's confession. She regretted having admitted that she thought the mistake had been someone else's. She was in no frame of mind to discuss Dr. Barrow with Terry. She was already too distressed over the answer she must give him before long. In fact, once or twice she had called herself a fool for thinking of passing him up. It was certain she could have everything her heart could wish, except the one thing she wanted most—someone to love.

But to her relief, Terry didn't mention the matter. Instead, he talked of the polio epidemic that had

come with the warm weather. There was no use in repeating how much she would like to be on his ward, helping him. He knew that well enough. And she also knew there was no hope of clearing herself in Miss Phillips' eyes. She could only do that by implicating Martha, and this would probably cost Martha her job.

Both the other girls were in, when she returned to the apartment, and as a rare treat were planning to have supper at home.

"We're putting your name in the pot, Nan," Carol called blithely from the kitchenette.

Sue was putting mats on the drop-leaf table at the end of the living room. "Oh, Nan," she said, "Mr. Sawyer phoned and asked you to come down to his office tomorrow morning."

"Mr. Sawyer? I know I've heard the name somewhere, but I can't place him," said Nancy, puzzled.

"He's a lawyer—that's all I know," Sue told her, on the way back to the kitchen for dishes.

Nancy was glad that she had gone out, when she felt the hot blood rushing to her face. Sawyer was the lawyer who had rewritten Mrs. Marshall's will. Could it mean that Mrs. Marshall had left her something? The possibility of being included in the will had never crossed her mind. Her one thought had been that Mrs. Marshall, in changing her will, wanted to leave part of her wealth to charity, rather than have it all squandered by the improvident Bert.

She hoped Bert would not be at the lawyer's office. She had made a point of telling him good-bye as they had stood outside the marble vault yesterday. Each had known that it was a final parting. Their only link now would be their mutual love for the great woman who had just left them.

"Knowing your grandmother has been one of the greatest privileges of my life," she told him. "She's given me a saner view of life and death, and more courage to face the struggle here."

"I wish I were all she wanted me to be," Bert

said, serious for once. "Or that I had the depth you have to understand all she would have taught me. I wish, too, I could have been worthy of you—"

"I'm afraid there couldn't be happiness for either of us together," Nancy said, shaking her head. "Our fundamental interests are too entirely different. I'd soon get bored with your kind of life, and I know you couldn't stand mine."

It was with a strange mixture of feelings that she rode up to the tenth floor of the Bankers Building the next morning. Whatever Mr. Sawyer had to tell her would certainly be a surprise. Nancy glanced at her watch when she stepped into the deeply carpeted, luxuriously furnished reception room. It was five minutes to ten, so she sat down in one of the cushioned chairs and picked up a magazine, though her wildly speculating mind failed to absorb anything she read.

Promptly at ten she rose and pressed the button of the electric bell at the inner door. It was opened almost at once by a well-groomed secretary.

"Miss Craig?" she asked.

"Yes. Mr. Sawyer wanted me to come at ten."

"He's waiting for you."

She led Nancy across the room where she had been working to an inner office. The silver-haired lawyer shook Nancy's hand and placed her chair across the desk from his. He seemed alert and capable and his eyes were kind.

"When Dr. Fenton comes, please show him right in," he told his secretary.

Dr. Fenton? Nancy thought. Why in the world would he be coming, too?

"I suppose you're wondering what this is all about, young lady," the lawyer said, as if in answer to her thoughts. He put the tips of his fingers together, and looked at her with an amused twinkle. He seemed to be enjoying her perplexity.

"I certainly am!"

"Well, you shouldn't be too surprised that Mrs. Marshall left you something in her will. She was very fond of you."

"I believe she was—and—and I loved her dearly. But I never dreamed when she wanted to change her will that I would feature in it."

"She left you ten thousand dollars in cash," said Sawyer, coming straight to the point.

"Oh, Mr. Sawyer!" exclaimed Nancy, feeling suddenly breathless. "How wonderful of her! Yet in a way it's awkward—"

"How so? She was a wealthy woman, and you brought her much comfort in her last days."

"But I wouldn't for the world have anyone think I influenced her to do such a thing."

Nancy still felt lightheaded with the impact of this unexpected news. Now she could help with Ellen's education, save some for helping Michael, later on, and have that car she needed. All this flashed into her mind while the lawyer bent to a desk drawer to get a paper.

"I'll read you the portion of the will that mentions you," he said. Lifting the rather lengthy document, he read an item near the bottom of a page:

"I also desire that Nancy Craig, the valiant little nurse who made life brighter for me in my last days, shall receive ten thousand dollars in cash."

Hot tears filmed Nancy's eyes. When the lawyer glanced up, she lowered them and a tear dropped on the back of her glove.

"She was a remarkable woman. I was very devoted to her myself," he said sympathetically.

After a moment, he cleared his throat and added, "But that was not the main reason Mrs. Marshall had me come over last week to change her will."

Nancy glanced up sharply. He had mentioned a moment ago that he was expecting Terry. As far as she knew, Terry had seen nothing of Mrs. Marshall since she had known her. She knew their families had once been friends, but she was almost sure the

association had not been kept up in recent years.

The lawyer was silent, so Nancy said frankly, "I suppose by your saying so much you intend to tell me the real reason for the changed will."

"Yes, in just a moment. There's the bell now. It must be Dr. Fenton. My secretary had to be quite emphatic as to the importance of his coming, to make him leave his work even for an hour."

Nancy was still in a mental fog when the secretary showed Terry in, and introduced him to Mr. Sawyer. Terry looked as puzzled as Nancy felt when he saw her sitting in front of the desk.

When the two men had shaken hands, Terry turned to Nancy.

"Nancy, what's this all about?" he said sharply.

Nancy threw out her hands, palms upward, and shrugged her shoulders. "You're no more puzzled than I am," she said. "But it probably has something to do with Mrs. Marshall's will."

"Mrs. Marshall's will!" exclaimed Terry. "Why she scarcely knew me— I've seen almost nothing of her since I was a youngster."

"She knew a great deal about you before she died. She talked to me often about you."

"But why?"

"If you'll sit down, young man, perhaps I can make things a little clearer," said the lawyer.

When Terry had taken a chair and pulled it closer to the desk, Mr. Sawyer said, "I asked you two to come at the same time as you both figure in a legacy Mrs. Marshall left. You'll probably be delighted to know that she has left money for a children's hospital."

"Oh, the darling!" exclaimed Nancy, in an outburst of delight. "Now I understand why she asked me so many questions."

"She specified in the clause leaving the money for the hospital," the lawyer went on, "that Dr. Fenton is to head the new hospital, if he so desires, as long as the hospital board feels he's serving the best in-

terests of the institution, and that Nancy Craig is to serve as one of the nurses, if she wishes to do so."

The glow that had brightened Terry's face at this incredible news was now replaced by a very puzzled expression. "I can't understand why she would specify me, when I've seen almost nothing of her in the last fifteen years—except perhaps that Nancy played me up." The smile he flashed at Nancy made her heart turn turtle.

"Though there's no mention of this in the will, I'll repeat what she told me. It was not given in confidence," said the lawyer. "Mrs. Marshall always had a feeling that her son didn't deal quite fairly with your father in business, Dr. Fenton."

Terry's face flushed, and he seemed to make an effort to control himself. Finally he said, "It's something I never spoke of, but an uncle of mine who died a few years ago told me he was certain Marshall had cheated my father out of most of his fortune. Of course I have no way of knowing. I was practically a child when we lost our money, and my father died soon after."

"Then it seems evident there really was some foundation for Mrs. Marshall's suspicions. At any rate, that was one of the underlying reasons why she wanted to make this bequest, and to have you benefit by it, Dr. Fenton—if you're interested."

"It's the work I'm most interested in, of course," said Terry. "I'm sure my parents could forgive their loss if they knew this wonderful thing she's done."

Mr. Sawyer went on to give more details about the board that had been chosen to handle the building fund and endowment, and of Mrs. Marshall's wish to begin construction just as soon as a suitable building site could be chosen. Terry and Nancy listened, their faces glowing with interest.

"I can't imagine a finer thing for a woman to do," said Terry.

"Now I understand why she kept asking me so many questions," remarked Nancy. "She wanted to

know all about the nurses and doctors who were most interested in work for children. And of course she knew, almost from the beginning of our acquaintance, how much I wanted to work with children."

As Frank Sawyer was one of the group on plans for the new hospital, he said, "Dr. Fenton, I hope you'll serve with the building committee on plans for the hospital. You would know best what is needed as to bed capacity and equipment. Do you think you'll have time to help us?"

"I'll make time!" Terry asserted emphatically. "To be able to plan a hospital I'm going to work in myself—why, it's unbelievable!"

He stood up as he spoke, adding, "But I must be getting back now. This polio epidemic is threatening to get out of control. We could certainly use more space right now." He glanced at Nancy. "Going back now, Nan?"

"If Mr. Sawyer is through."

"Quite," the lawyer said, rising. "I'll keep in touch with you both. And a check will be in the mail for you, Miss Craig, as soon as affairs can be properly settled."

As they went down the hall toward the elevator, Terry said, "What did he mean by that last?"

"Mrs. Marshall left me ten thousand dollars," she told him.

"It's no more than you deserve, but patients are rarely so thoughtful. I'm happy for you."

"It makes me feel humble—and—and very grateful. With Dad probably an invalid the rest of his life, it will help ease the strain at home."

On the drive back to Nancy's apartment, they plunged into a discussion of the new hospital, and when Terry left her at her door, he was as enthusiastic as she over what seemed a miracle to both of them.

Sue and Carol were on duty, so Nancy had the prospect of a day to herself in the apartment. She had not called to have her name returned to the nurse's

list, and she decided to put her clothes in order before she did call in, and to do a bit of cleaning in the apartment.

As she worked, her mind kept going back to the questions Mrs. Marshall had asked her. It was while they were in the mountains that she seemed to become definitely aware of the great need for more hospital space for children in Summerton. As Nancy reviewed their talks, in the light of this wonderful legacy, she realized how plans had developed in the sick woman's mind. Thinking back over it now, she knew there had been more probing into Terry's character and background than she had been aware of at the time. No doubt, too, her patient had suspected Nancy's love for this young doctor, in spite of her wishful thinking that her grandson might marry a girl of her stability.

Nancy remembered that one day when Mrs. Marshall seemed rather depressed she had tried to brighten her up by telling her the story of their new maid, and her use of the dishpan in clearing the table. This had naturally led into a recounting of the further complications of that eventful Sunday, and Mrs. Marshall had probably drawn her own conclusions about why Nancy was so upset over Dr. Barrow's unexpected arrival.

The thought of Dr. Barrow plunged her into depression again. She hadn't seen him alone since he had made his surprising proposal. He had been one of the honorary pallbearers at the funeral, but she had merely spoken to him in passing. He had been so wonderful to her that she couldn't bear to hurt him. The best way to break off with him might be by letter, she decided.

She had finished her cleaning, had written the short but difficult note to Dr. Barrow, and was writing a long letter to her family, telling them her surprising news, when the phone rang. To her amazement, she heard Miss Phillips' voice.

"Miss Craig," she said, "if you haven't already

promised to take another case, I wonder if you'd be willing to come over and help on pediatrics?"

"Would I? I've always wanted to do just that."

"Then you can come?"

"Of course. When do you want me?"

"At once. Could you go on three o'clock duty?"

Nancy glanced at her watch and saw that it was one-thirty. "I'll be there," she said, and hung up.

She brought her letter to a hasty conclusion with the additional good news. "My good star must be in the ascendant today," she told her family.

She speculated about what had changed Miss Phillips. Of course her attitude had improved greatly since Nancy had saved her sister's life, but Nancy knew even that wouldn't make the Supervisor of Nurses unbend enough to call her back to service on the staff if she still thought her a careless nurse.

But Nancy was too happy over present prospects to worry over how it had come about. Her heart and step were buoyant when she left for the hospital at two-thirty. She had only a fleeting wish that her hours could have been from seven to three, when practically all her service could have been given while Terry was on duty.

When she reported to Frances Fuller, head nurse of the ward, she received a hearty welcome. Miss Fuller had come to Summerton from a hospital in Chicago, and Nancy had not met her until now. She was pleased to realize she was getting off to a good start with her.

"Dr. Fenton is much relieved to have your extra help," said the nurse. She was tall and straight, and gave Nancy a feeling that she was quite competent as she led her over the ward, pointing out her duties.

"Dr. Fenton is performing an emergency operation right now, but he said he'd see you later," Miss Fuller told her.

Nancy was assigned the care of half the patients in one of the larger rooms where children whose parents could not pay, or who could pay only a little,

were assigned. She had come here several times to visit Tommy, after the contagious stage of his illness had passed.

At first most of the children were shy at being cared for by a stranger, but Nancy couldn't remain a stranger to any child long. Soon her sympathetic smile, her encouraging words, won them over.

It was almost time for the children's supper, and she was bathing the face of a particularly pitiful spastic boy, when Terry appeared at the foot of the bed. She glanced up, smiling her most radiant smile.

"Doing what you love, as last?" he said.

She stood up and came closer to him. "Terry, I was never so amazed as when Miss Phillips phoned me. What happened?"

He grinned at her then. "The dear lady actually admitted she had been a bit hasty when she gave you your walking papers."

"But what made her change? Of course she's been nicer to me ever since I pulled her sister through that crisis, but I was beginning to wonder if she'd ever unbend enough to give me this job."

"I told her the whole truth, as I heard Martha tell it to you."

"Oh no, Terry! I wouldn't have had you do that for the world! What about Martha's job?"

"I convinced her that Martha was not really careless, but that she was naturally worried and scared out of her wits that day. If she hadn't kept her on, I knew of another job I could get for Martha."

Her glance went up to meet his. Towering above her, in the white coat that was the badge of his profession, he suddenly seemed dignified and remote. Must there always be this silly barrier between them? She started to put her thought into words, and just then they heard the other nurse on the ward coming down the corridor outside. Terry bent quickly and whispered, "I'm going off duty now, but I'll pick you up at eleven to take you home."

Although Nancy had much to do and was very

happy in doing it, the time seemed to drag until she took off her cap at eleven and threw her blue cape around her shoulders. She had gone into the corridor when she saw Terry coming from one of the private rooms.

"I just looked in on the little fellow I operated on this afternoon, and he's doing fine."

He said nothing more as he followed her out of the building to the parking area in the rear. It was rather dark there, so he took her arm to steer her toward his car. He helped her in and hurried around to slip under the wheel. He thrust his key into the switch, but he didn't start the car. Then suddenly he reached over and pulled Nancy to him. For a moment she was startled; then she relaxed, yielding her lips to his.

"Terry, when did you finally decide you cared a little?" she whispered, when he finally released her.

"Cared a little!" he burst out. "I've loved you since the first time I saw you—but there were those infernal debts, and I didn't have any right to keep you waiting."

"Even after I told you that no girl would be worth her salt if she wasn't willing to struggle toward success with her husband?"

"That made me love you all the more—and be more determined than ever that I wouldn't inflict any hardships on you. Then by the time I saw my way clear of debt, it looked as if you were in love with Dr. Barrow."

"Dr. Barrow has always been like a father to me." She felt a small twinge of guilt.

"And then along came Bert Marshall, taking you everywhere, spending money like water—"

"Terry, you know I'd soon be bored to death going to cocktail parties and night clubs with Bert Marshall."

"I guess I *was* nuts. But a fellow's judgment gets warped when he looks at everything through the green haze of jealousy."

"Then let this experience be a lesson to you the rest of your life, young man," she said with mock severity.

For answer he kissed her again, very tenderly this time. Then he said softly, "When I learned today that we'd be going into business together in the new hospital, I thought we'd better make it an all-round partnership. What do you say?"

"Okay by me," she said.

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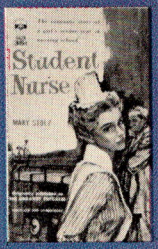

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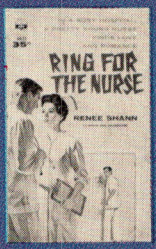

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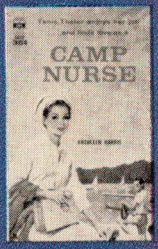

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